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ABSTRACT

A study sought to determine the rate of retention of adult students in the University of Minnesota College Program for Individualized Learning (PIL) for the 1983-84 academic year, as well as factors that might relate to this retention rate. A review was made of the 67 applications submitted by students admitted to PIL during that year to determine demographic information and to assess perceived barriers to pursuing education and the students' orientations to learning. Further investigation of each student's program revealed his or her registration pattern, the status of his or her program four years later, and the last stage of program successfully completed. Follow-up interviews also were conducted with academic advisers to find any links between adviser behavior and retention. The study found that slightly less than half of the students admitted to PIL during the 1983-84 academic year were still in the program or had graduated as of fall quarter 1987. Age and gender of PIL students did not appear to be factors in academic persistence. The study found positive relationships between the following factors and academic persistence: proximity of residence, previous postsecondary education, 10 or more years of professional experience, interest in learning for learning's sake, and frequent contact with advisers. Those who dropped out did so more for personal situational reasons than for institutional ones. Implications of the study point to possible changes in admittance standards, advising, program development and administration, and further research. A program description and data forms are appended. (KC)

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RETENTION OF ADULT LEARNERS IN AN INDIVIDUALIZED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PROGRAM

Plan B Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

University of Minnesota

By

Shirley M. Holm

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Master of Arts Degree

in Education

April, 1988

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Dedicated to Rob and David . . .

and to Rachel,

for waiting

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This paper reports the results of research on the retention of adult learners in an individualized degree program at the University of Minnesota. Emphasis is placed on understanding the relationship between students' success in completing a baccalaureate education, and various factors such as demographics, students' learning orientations, and their reasons for selecting an individualized degree program. The relationship of academic advising and retention is also examined.

This chapter has a number of functions. First, three student profiles will introduce the issues which provided the inspiration for this project. These profiles are followed by a statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. Next, the theoretical framework for the study is outlined, and a brief overview of the research methodology is presented. Finally, the significance of the study is briefly discussed.

The setting for this research project is the Program for Individualized Learning (PIL)--formerly University Without Walls--at the University of Minnesota. PIL is an individualized baccalaureate degree program that is nontraditional in both form and content. It is not credit based; a set of general graduation criteria is used to

determine program standards. Students must create the specific content of their degree programs. In keeping with the non-credit based nature of the program, students propose a broad array of methods of learning in their degree plans. Learning from life experiences is a fundamental element of this nontraditional degree program.

The primary people served by PIL are adults returning to the higher education environment after a number of years in the workforce. The average age of PIL students is 33. In part they are attracted to the program since they may use substantial amounts of learning gained outside the classroom. About 80 percent of current PIL students work, and a great majority of them also have family, community, and social commitments. They are people who play multiple roles in their lives: mothers/ fathers, marriage partners, workers, citizens, community activists, and consumers of leisure. When they come to PIL they add another demanding role to their lives--undergraduate student.

Student Profiles

Faith is a 47 year old single parent with three teenage daughters. She completed three years of nursing training, making consistently solid grades, and received her R.N. certificate in 1963. Since that time, Faith has advanced professionally through many positions. When her children were young, she worked part-time as a "bedside" nurse. She

eventually took a full-time clinical nurse position, but was quickly promoted to a supervisory position. She is now vice president of health services administration at a local medium-sized hospital.

Faith took advantage of many educational opportunities over the years to complement her professional development. Every year she attends at least two to three in-service training sessions sponsored by the hospital on a wide range of topics. For example, in-service training sessions introduced Faith to new hospital equipment such as neo-natal intensive care instruments, cardiac monitors, and laser machines. She became familiar with new hospital procedures and medical cost containment methods such as flow charting, diagnostic-related groupings, health maintenance organizations (HMOs), Medicare, and Medicaid plans. She learned about the most recent trends in diseases and health risks, such as AIDS, environmental pollution, and poor health habits. She remained active in professional associations such as the National Nursing Association, and attended their national conferences and special institutes. She is a regular subscriber to journals related to her field and uses her spare time to read about recent developments in nursing administration.

Faith generally has some specific goals in mind when she plans and executes her learning. Frequently, her goals are work-related. She wants to improve her clinical practice, advance her administrative skills, and increase her knowledge

of the field. She has a purpose in mind when she undertakes a learning activity. She also likes to learn just to keep herself and her mind active, but she finds that specific goals help motivate her to take action.

Bob, like Faith, is an adult continuing learner. At the age of 35, he finds himself unhappy in his job as a postal carrier, but is unable to leave it because of the financial security it provides him. Although he is single with no children, he has become accustomed to having some of the material securities of middle-class American culture. He owns a decent, reliable car, lives in a modest home in a good neighborhood, and takes regular vacations to various U.S. national parks and campgrounds.

Bob's genuine interest and motivation is in the outdoors. He has been an avid camper and boater since childhood. As an adult, he has been active in organizations such as Outward Bound, YMCA, and various experiential education programs. He developed an interest in troubled youth and has been the leader of numerous camping expeditions to expose adjudicated teenagers to the challenges and rewards of learning outdoor survival skills. Although Bob has volunteered much of his time to be involved in these activities, he has also held a number of paid positions. Because the positions were frequently not full-time or permanent, he found job security within the U.S. postal system.

Bob has about two years of prior formal college experience from the 1960s, but his record was spotty. If something interested him, he did well. When he was bored or distracted by other events in his life, he did average or below average work. Incompletes were not uncommon.

Through his experiential education, Bob acquired new skills and knowledge, including outdoor survival skills, knowledge of individual and group counseling techniques, programming ability, and administrative expertise. His motivation for learning has been his unbridled enthusiasm for the outdoors and his strong belief in the social benefits to youth of outdoor experiences. Much of his learning is directed towards improving his skills and knowledge in this area.

Jane is also interested in experiential education, but from a perspective different from Bob's. The programming possibilities intrigue her. She sees how experiential education can be used with a diversity of populations for a variety of purposes. She is interested in designing programs directed towards the development of personal meaning, cultural awareness and social change. Jane is young (22 years old), intellectually sophisticated, and academically capable. She attended an elite New England private college for slightly more than two years, receiving excellent grades, and then took time off to participate in a variety of social causes.

Jane is single and identifies herself as a full-time student. Although she has held some temporary jobs in the area of experiential education, she is just beginning her professional pursuits in the field. Jane loves to learn. She is an avid reader and her interests are broad. She has studied literature, anthropology, history, and philosophy. She has traveled around the U.S., meeting and studying people of varying cultures and backgrounds. Her interests are so varied that she has had difficulty focussing on one area exclusively in order to complete her undergraduate education.

Statement of Problem

At different points during the academic year 1983-84, Faith, Bob, and Jane all investigated the Program for Individualized Learning and decided to apply for admission and continue their pursuit of the baccalaureate degree. All were admitted. Two years later, Faith withdrew from the program without completing her degree. Three years after admission, Jane graduated with a B.A. degree. And four years from admission, at the date of this study, Bob was still actively enrolled in the program, making steady but slow progress toward the degree.

What are some of the factors that may have influenced the eventual courses of these three people as they continued their undergraduate degree programs? How do their profiles fit with research findings about who persists in academic work and who

is at risk? How do demographic factors such as age, sex, distance from campus, and past educational and professional experience affect academic persistence? What barriers did these people face in pursuing a degree? How might these barriers have affected their academic success? What were their orientations to learning? Are there any apparent relationships between the barriers to learning and the learning orientations? What was the nature of these students' relationships with their academic advisers? Does adviser behavior appear to have any relationship to the academic success of students?

Purpose of the Study

An interest in these questions became the basis for a study of retention patterns for students admitted to PIL. The overall purposes of this study were, first, to determine the rate of retention of adults in PIL during one selected academic year and, second, to analyze a variety of factors which might relate to this retention rate. Specifically, the study sought to determine if students with certain characteristics and learning orientations persist in their degree work in greater numbers than others with different characteristics and learning orientations. An example of a specific characteristic of interest was the information about the persistence rate of students who live at a distance from the University of Minnesota campus, where PIL is located. PIL advisers have long suspected that students at a distance from campus have more

difficulty completing their degree work than local students do. This study will confirm or refute this suspicion. If the data suggest that distant students are at a greater risk for not completing their degree work, PIL will need to reexamine its policies and practices for serving this population.

In addition, the study included an investigation of the impact on retention of such factors as age, sex, and past experience, both educational and professional. Barriers and motivations for pursuing higher education through PIL, and the relationship of adviser behavior to retention patterns, were also examined.

Theoretical Framework

The theory and literature relevant to this study come from three primary sources. Most pertinent to the issue of retention of adult students in PIL is the small number of retention studies done in nontraditional degree programs with a similar age population. An ERIC search revealed five such studies, two conducted at the Stephens College Without Walls (Columbia, Missouri), one done at the Individualized Degree Program at Central Michigan University, and two research projects from the Weekend College at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Although Stephens College Without Walls (SCWW) and the Individualized Degree Program (IDP) are very similar in structure and population served, their research resulted in

some distinctly different findings. For example, older students (over age 50) at SCWW were more likely to graduate than younger ones (Losty and Kreilick, 1982, p. 265). The IDP study revealed that younger students (under age 30) graduate or make progress toward the degree in larger percentages than older students (Billingham and Travaglini, 1981, p. 177). The two studies also found that different types of learning activities undertaken shortly after admission predicted academic success in each program. Students at SCWW ultimately did better in their degree programs if they enrolled in structured coursework early in their studies (Losty and Broderman, 1980, p. 98). IDP students persisted in greater numbers if they earned experiential learning credits soon after enrolling in the program (Billingham and Travaglini, p. 178).

A much broader body of literature on the overall topic of retention in higher education was also consulted. Although much of this literature deals with the 18-22 year old student in traditional programs, the information provides the general background for viewing characteristics unique to adult students in individualized programs. Of particular interest were those studies dealing with part-time and adult students in traditional baccalaureate programs.

As with the research directly relevant to adults in nontraditional degree programs, the results of overall research on adult students are inconclusive regarding the impact of age on retention. Research findings both support and refute the

speculation that age can predict academic persistence and success (Levitz and Noel, 1980, p. 147). However, the literature on retention of adult learners is unanimous about one point: the amount and level of previous educational achievement is predictive of academic participation and persistence (Pappas and Loring, in Noel and Levitz, 1985, p. 147-148).

In this study of PIL retention rates, two specific sources provided the framework for examining learning orientations and barriers to participation. Cyril Houle's classifications of learner orientations (i.e., oriented to learning for learning's sake, goal-oriented, and activity-oriented) provided the framework for organizing and analyzing students' reasons for pursuing higher education (Houle, 1961, p. 15-16). In addition, three categories of educational barriers (i.e., institutional, situational, and psychosocial), were used to classify students' reasons for seeking admission to PIL (Cross, 1981, p. 98). These classifications and categories brought clarity and uniformity to the diversity of reasons and motivations adults describe for pursuing a non-traditional baccalaureate degree program.

Brief Overview of Research Methods

Students admitted during the 1983-84 academic year were selected for study; students admitted at that time had had three to four years to make progress by the point at which this

study commenced. PIL structures and policies have not undergone dramatic changes during these years, which is not true of the years prior to 1983-84.

This research project includes a review of the 112 applications submitted to PIL during the 1983-84 academic year. All applications that were found acceptable for admission were examined to determine demographic information and to assess perceived barriers to pursuing education and the students' orientations to learning. Further investigation of each student's program revealed his or her registration pattern, the status of his or her program four years later (graduated, currently active, or dropped/ withdrew), and the last stage of program successfully completed. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with academic advisers to investigate any links between adviser behavior and retention.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study rests primarily with the potential to improve services to returning adult students. The information provided should assist advisers to help adults make informed choices about their educational futures. If students are made aware of potential risks, they will be better prepared to undertake the rigors of degree work. This research should therefore have significance for practitioners in adult education. Possible results include improved academic

advising, revised program policies and/or structures, and possible increases in rates of student retention.

This research also has significance for theory. In addition to testing accepted theory in the area of student retention, this study will investigate some new areas. Is there any relationship between learning orientation and barriers which has an impact on retention? Are specific barriers more commonly found for students who do not complete the degree than for those who do? In the literature on student retention, students with good prior academic records typically are the most successful degree completers (Pappas and Loring, in Noel and Levitz, 1985, p. 147-148). This study will investigate the relevance of this finding for a particular sample of PIL students. The results will contribute to the overall body of theory regarding retention of adult students in higher education.

Organization of the Paper

This paper is organized into five chapters. This first chapter introduced the problem studied, reviewed the purpose of the project, provided an overview of methods and literature, and presented the significance of the topic. Chapter Two reviews the literature on student retention, focussing primarily on research studies of adult students in traditional and nontraditional degree programs. The second chapter also reviews the terminology and research tools used in this study.

Chapter Three reviews the methodology used in this study, including a description of the sample population, a rationale for the year selected for the research, a discussion of the data collection process, an overview of how the data were analyzed, and an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study. Chapter Four presents the findings. Chapter Five summarizes the problem, methods, and findings; it concludes with the implications this research has for students, advisers, program development, and for further research in the field of adult education.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As a first step in identifying and reviewing the literature pertinent to the retention of adult students in individualized degree programs, a search of the Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) was done. This search produced a 121 page bibliography with 175 entries. The great majority of the sources dealt with only one aspect of the overall topic. For example, studies that focussed on retention of college students frequently did not address adult students and seldom discussed individualized or nontraditional degree programs. Articles about adult students often dealt with admission, recruitment, or academic performance and did not directly address academic persistence, success, and retention. However, the ERIC search did lead to 21 journal articles related to this research topic. Of these 21 articles, five dealt directly with the topic of the retention of adult students in nontraditional baccalaureate degree programs.

This chapter is organized using categories of literature most relevant to the project topic. The discussion begins with a review of definitions of terminology, such as retention, academic persistence, academic success, attrition, stopout, and dropout. Certain terms are identified for use in this paper.

The second topic discussed is the research directly dealing with the same population, topic, and setting as this paper: retention of adults in nontraditional (or individualized) baccalaureate degree programs. The third section reviews briefly some of the literature on the overall topic of retention. Attention is given specifically to research on adults and part-time students. The chapter concludes with a discussion of specific theoretical frameworks used in this research, including a description of the research tools used to conduct the study.

Retention: Definitions and Description

Selecting identifying words to use in the ERIC search was a productive and useful process. A manual search of the Thesaurus of Eric Descriptors, Resources in Education (RIE), and the Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE), was done to determine the best descriptors for this type of study. There were some surprises in definitions, especially the definition of retention, which has two different meanings. The term is used extensively in ERIC as a psychological term to indicate retention of learning; retention is also the overall term used to describe continued enrollment in educational programs. In Retention and Attrition: Evidence for Action and Research, retention is defined as "that which occurs when students complete, continue, or resume their studies" (Lenning, Beal, and Sauer, 1980, p. 10).

For the purposes of this study, two phrases were more pertinent: school holding power and academic persistence. Clearly the most productive descriptor was school holding power. Eighteen citations were found under this listing, including articles directly related to the research topic.

The least useful descriptors were terms using the word individualized (individualized education programs, individualized instruction, and individualized programs). These descriptors are generally used to mean programs dealing with discipline and behavior problems, mental illness, and retardation in children. Nontraditional has numerous meanings in education, only one of which fits this research project. Many citations used nontraditonal to mean disadvantaged, minority, and low income students, rather than the population investigated in this study: students older than traditional college-aged students (18-22). Adult students was an accurate descriptor, but resulted in a wide range of citations that covered topics beyond the academic persistence of adult students.

The literature resulting from the ERIC search process revealed seven additional terms which are related to retention. Attrition is the general term used to describe the termination of enrollment in an educational program, "when students are no longer enrolled in an educational program" (Lenning, et al., 1980, p. 10).

Lenning, Beal, and Sauer go on to confront a myth that persists about retention and attrition: that retention is good and attrition is bad. They propose a more neutral view: the goals and best interests of the students being served should be the most important consideration as students begin or continue their studies (pp. 2-3). Vincent Tinto, in "Dropping Out and Other Forms of Withdrawal from College," argues that "the primary goal of effective retention programs should not be merely that more students be retained but that they be further educated" (Noel, Levitz, and Saluri, 1985, p. 29). Genuine educative purposes, and not merely retention, should be the goal of reenrollment.

One aspect of retention is academic persistence. In her article "Retention of Undergraduate Women of Nontraditional Age: Patterns, Strategies, and Services," Mary Ann Brenden (1985) notes that "traditionally, persistence has been defined as completion of a baccalaureate degree within a four-year period of time" (p. 22). She suggests a revised definition to fit the lifestyles of returning adult students. This definition eliminates the four-year schedule but maintains an emphasis on continued progress toward the degree. This progress is demonstrated by "continuing registration and completion of courses in the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree" (p. 23). This definition allows for part-time pursuit of the degree and for defined (not indefinite) periods of inactivity. The multiple priorities often present in adults' lives are

accommodated by this definition. The research project undertaken in PIL used this definition of academic persistence to determine retention rates and academic progress towards the degree.

The phrase academic success has slightly different definitions depending on the research study consulted. Barbara Losty, writing with Deborah D. Broderson and Debra Rae Kreilick (1980, 1982) in two separate studies of graduates and inactive students at Stephens College Without Walls (SCWW), defines academic success as the completion of the B.A. degree. Carol Billingham and Joseph Travaglini (1981), writing about Central Michigan University's Individualized Degree Program (IDP) in their article "Predicting Adult Academic Success in an Undergraduate Degree Program," define academic success as "significant progress toward graduation" (p. 170). For the purposes of their research, Billingham and Travaglini defined significant progress as work on "credits toward the degree within the last twelve months" (p. 171). They acknowledge, however, the limitations of this definition. Because adults often interrupt their studies for a variety of reasons and for varying lengths of time, therefore "the categorizations should not be viewed as static and permanent" (p. 176).

The difficulties encountered in defining academic success are also present in definitions of program withdrawal, nonpersistence, and inactivity. Brenden (1985) defines nonpersistence as "withdrawal, formally discontinuing work

towards the degree" (p.23). The PIL retention study also uses a withdrawal category to describe those students who formally discontinue their enrollment in PIL. Losty defines inactive students as those who had not graduated by a particular point in time (Losty and Broderson, 1980, p. 93). Billingham and Travaglini define inactivity as no registration for degree credits within the last year (p. 171). As noted earlier, however, Billingham and Travaglini note the fluid nature of this categorization--and recommend that "assumptions about whether students have become permanently inactive . . . be carefully conditioned by the recognition that many personal, social, and economic factors affect their motivation and rate of progress in an educational program" (pp. 176-77).

Other terms used to describe students who are not actively seeking degree work are stopout and dropout. Stopouts generally refer to students who plan to continue working toward their degree but have to interrupt their studies for periods of time. Lenning, Beal and Sauer (1980) describe the goal of these students as "sometime graduation" rather than "on-time graduation." A dropout is a student who "leaves the institution and does not return for additional study at any time, or at the time of the study" (p. 10). Classification in these categories is not necessarily permanent. For example, a dropout who returns to school needs to be reclassified as a stopout. These classifications are not used in this study of retention of PIL students.

Retention of Adults in Nontraditional Undergraduate Degree Programs

Stephens College Without Walls

In "Who Succeeds? A Comparison of Transcripts of Graduates and Inactive Students of a Nontraditional Bachelor of Arts Degree Program," Barbara Losty and Deborah Broderson (1980) compared the amount and type of past college work, previous grade point averages, and amount and type of course registrations of graduates and inactive students at SCWW. Graduates and inactive students differed significantly both in how much past college work they had completed and in what type. Graduates had more previous college credits than inactives: "While only 4% of the graduates entered the program with 16 courses or fewer, 17% of the inactives entered with fewer than two years of college credit" (p.94). The SCWW study also made a distinction between previous traditional versus nontraditional credit. Nontraditional credit was defined as "credit granted for nursing, military, and other non-college-sponsored programs, CLEP" (p. 93). Inactives more often had only nontraditional credit at the point of admission than graduates. "Almost three-quarters (73%) of the graduates entered with a mix of previous learning, while only 50% of the inactives entered with both types of credit" (p. 94).

Graduates were more likely than inactives to have had higher GPAs from past college work and to have received a

higher grade on their first course at SCWW, the Liberal Studies Seminar (LSS). Losty and Broderson suggest that these higher grades might be a reflection of students' past positive experience in the educational environment or might indicate higher levels of ability in these students (p. 97).

The type of registration completed after the LSS was predictive of eventual success in SCWW. Inactives never registered for a traditional Stephens College class and most frequently opted for a guided study, which requires no on-campus attendance and is completed solely by correspondence. Students who completed a Stephens College course after the LLS had a good chance of completing their program. Of the two-thirds who completed at least one course, 87 percent continued through to graduation (p. 98).

Losty and Broderman indicate that returning adult students tend to be academically successful at SCWW if they have the following three characteristics: 1) they have two or more years of traditional past college credits; 2) they have a GPA over 3.00; and 3) they complete some type of structured coursework immediately after completion of their initial LSS registration. The authors recommend early program planning with each new student, mechanisms for teaching students skills of independent study and time management, and the development of referral networks for students with extensive past nontraditonal work.

Losty, in collaboration with Debra Kreilick (1982), completed another study of SCWW graduates and inactive students focussing on reasons for pursuing higher education in general and SCWW in particular. Demographic comparisons revealed one significant difference between graduates and inactive students: older students were more likely to graduate from SCWW than younger adults. Although there were no statistically different reasons for pursuing the B.A. degree, graduates had more reasons than inactive students: "Of the graduates, 29% gave three or more reasons; only 13% of the inactives listed more than two" (p. 263). When asked why they selected SCWW specifically, inactive students again gave fewer reasons than graduates: "Only 10% of the graduates, but 23% of the inactives, listed a single reason for selecting the SCWW program" (p. 264).

Graduates and inactive students were also asked to rate a variety of internal and external factors as assets or problems for continuing their degree work. Internal factors included seven dispositional forces such as study skills, motivation, and communication ability; external factors included job and family responsibilities, time, and finances. Graduates tended to rate internal factors as assets, whereas a majority of the inactives found only one internal factor to be an asset--interest in completing the degree (pp. 265-66).

With only one exception, external factors were not regarded as assets or problems by either group of students.

Inactives noted more problems with finding time to study than graduates did. Losty and Kreilick noted that finances might also be a problem for inactives, because younger age groups had lower incomes and commented on the hardship created by the cost of SCWW classes. The authors conclude that those students who have multiple reasons for pursuing a degree program and who "perceive more aspects of their own abilities and of the program as assets" are more likely to experience academic success in a nontraditional higher educational environment (p. 266).

The Individualized Degree Program at Central Michigan University

Billingham and Travaglini (1981) report two findings that are distinctly different from those of Losty, Kreilick, and Broderson. Although the Individualized Degree Program (IDP) at Central Michigan University is remarkably similar to SCWW (adult population, use of prior learning, flexible course scheduling, etc.), their predictors for success differ on issues of age and type of learning engaged in shortly after admission. The IDP study revealed that younger students (under age 30) graduate or make progress toward the degree in larger percentages than older students. "Students age 30 or less account for 15 and 15.5% respectively of the graduated and active groups, but drop to only 3.1% of the inactive group" (p. 177).

The type of learning activity pursued shortly after admission also predicted academic success for IDP students. Specifically, students who earned experiential learning credits soon after enrolling in IDP graduated from the program in greater numbers than other students: "only 8.5% of the inactive students obtained experiential learning credits, compared with 25.9% of the active students and 82.5% of the graduates" (p. 178). Transfer credits also correlated with academic success: "all of the students who graduated and 91% of the active students have transfer credits, compared with only 77% of the inactive students" (p. 178). The typical amount of past work transferred into IDP is two years. This finding is consistent with the Losty studies at SCWW.

Two other points predicted academic success for IDP students: grade point average and attitude toward CMU staff and program advisers. As with the findings at SCWW, the higher the grade point average for IDP work completed, the higher the rate of student activity. Perception of the attitudes of CMU advisers differed between active and inactive students. Active students and graduates rated many or most staff as "helpful and encouraging"; this rating was given less than 60% of the time by inactive students (p.180).

Weekend College at The College of St. Catherine

The two studies conducted at the Weekend College (WEC) at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota are also

relevant to the study of retention in PIL, although the program structures and students served are somewhat different (Thieman, Marsh-Williams, 1984; Brenden, 1985). The Weekend College serves returning adult students, but serves women in far larger numbers than men, since St. Catherine's is historically a Catholic women's college. And, although WEC is called nontraditional, its primary innovation is in the scheduling of traditional classes. Classes are offered every other weekend to accommodate the professional schedules of mature working women who also have family obligations (Thieman, Marsh-Williams, p. 260). WEC does not grant credit for prior learning or offer experiential learning opportunities.

Both studies examined demographic differences between persisters and non-persisters. Brenden (1985) defined persistence as "continuing registration for and completion of courses in the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree" (p. 23). Nonpersistence was indicated by formal withdrawal from degree studies (p. 23). The Thieman, Marsh-Williams study (1984) is noteworthy for its findings on the lack of apparent connection between specific demographic factors and academic persistence: "Age, number of children, years away from school, and the amount of prior college experience were unrelated to academic success" (p. 263). The Brenden study (1985) confirms the relationship of previous and current educational attainment and academic persistence: "Relative rate of persistence improved as high school class rank percentile increased. . . .

Persistence improves dramatically for students with a GPA 2.5 and above" (pp.24-25). The findings regarding age were inconclusive. The highest rate of persistence was among students aged 36-41, but no overall pattern emerged in the relationship of age to persistence.

Each study also examined other topics. Mary Ann Brenden investigated the connection between persistence and the number and pattern of leaves of absence taken during enrollment in WEC. Thieman and Marsh-Williams focussed on the academic self-concept of students and their use of leisure time.

The leave-taking pattern of WEC students revealed a relationship with academic persistence. Students taking one leave of absence had a relative persistence rate of only 42 percent, compared with 60 percent for students taking no leaves and 67 percent for students taking two or more leaves of absence (Brenden, 1985).

Two predictors of academic success were a brief writing test administered to all applicants (the "Test of Standard Written English" or TSWE), and the student's self-reported assessment of their academic self-concept. High scores on the TSWE and strong academic self-concepts were predictive of higher GPA levels attained in the Weekend College (Thieman, Marsh-Williams, 1984, p. 263).

Retention of Adult Learners in Traditional Programs

Research on the retention and attrition of adult learners in traditionally structured degree programs is quite limited. This is at least partially due to the multiple ways in which colleges and universities interpret the concept of attrition for adult learners. In 1980, Randi Levitz and Lee Noel from the American College Testing Program conducted a comprehensive national survey of adult programs and services. This survey, Attracting and Retaining Adult Learners (ARAL), investigated (among other issues) the rates of adult enrollment, definitions of adult dropouts, and reasons for attrition at 1554 institutions of higher education across the country. Only 88 institutions provided definitions of adult attrition behavior, which included the following: "Adults stopped attending classes in mid-semester; finished a semester's work but did not register the following semester, or after a specified number of semesters; or did not complete the planned program of study" (p. 10). Rarely did institutions define dropout as formal withdrawal from the college or university. Although many facets of adult enrollment and retention are summarized in this report, no data on retention rates are presented. Definitional and methodological problems are endemic to the study of retention and attrition rates of adult learners.

ARAL does, however, provide insight into the perceptions of administrators in higher education as to why adults leave school. The two highest rated reasons for adult attrition as

perceived by administrators are conflicts with work commitments and schedules, and "conflicts with home, family, or child-care responsibilities" (Levitz, Noel, p.10). This perception is challenged somewhat by Carol Kayla (1982) in her study entitled "Impact of the Older Student on Undergraduate Enrollment." Kayla, citing Gordon G. Darkenwald, points out that although situational considerations such as conflicts with job, family, and schedule commitments are important, "they alone do not cause a student to dropout, but just contribute to the decision" (p. 8). Other factors considered important in the decision to discontinue degree studies are the length of classes, the frequency of class meetings, and the number of students in classes. Adults persist in higher numbers in shorter classes with less frequent class meetings and with under ten students enrolled (Anderson and Darkenwald, 1979; Verner and Davis; and Boshier, 1973; as cited in Kayla, 1982, p. 8).

Of the literature reviewed for this study of retention in PIL, only one source speculated about the probable attrition rate of adult students across all types of higher education institutions. William Haponski (1983) proposes that "a fifty percent attrition rate seems likely to pertain at many institutions" (p. 5). He goes on to explain that the difficulty with obtaining attrition rates is related to the part-time nature of attendance of adult students.

The Bureau of Census notes that adult learners are more likely to enroll as part-time students, and Kayla (1982) indicates that 72 percent of students 25 and older are enrolled part-time (p.11). However, two institutional research projects contradict this finding. Most of the adult students sampled at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, and West Virginia University attended school on a full-time basis (Mishler, Frederick, Hogan, Woody, 1982, p.35; Kayla, 1982, p.11). Further research is needed to determine if the majority of adult students, especially those enrolled in degree programs, are attending on a part-time basis, as often believed.

The results of research about age as a predictor of academic persistence and success are also inconclusive. George D. Kuh and Larry Cracroft (1986) begin their article "Predicting Adult Learners' Success in Higher Education" with the statement that "adult learners are more likely to drop out than their traditional-age counterparts" (p.3). Keith Harman, the Director of the Office of Educational Grants at Southeast Missouri State University, agrees with this statement. He writes that "non-persisters and persisters differ markedly on the basis of age. . . . Non-persisters tend to be older, age 45 and above" (Fastig, 1979, and Jones, 1979, as cited in Harman, 1983, p. 58). However, in Mishler's study at the University of Wisconsin, adult learners performed academically as well as traditional age students (Mishler, 1982, p. 38).

James P. Pappas and Rosalind K. Loring, writing on the topic of returning learners in Noel, Levitz, and Saluri's book Increasing Student Retention, refer to research findings that both support and refute the speculation that age can predict academic persistence and success. "Major research findings have produced strong but contradictory results. Anderson and Darkenwald (1979) confirm earlier findings (Boshier, 1979) that older adults are less likely to drop out than other students. . . . However, using a very large sample, Aslanian and Brickell (1980) suggest that adult learners and persisters tend to be at the younger end of the adult age scale" (p. 147). Kayla (1982), in her literature review, also finds the results of studies regarding age and retention to be inconclusive (pp. 7-8).

The literature on retention of adult learners is unanimous about one point: the amount and level of previous educational achievement is predictive of academic participation and persistence for adult learners (Pappas and Loring, in Noel, Levitz, and Saluri 1985, p. 147-148). This finding argues strongly for the development of special services for those returning adult students who have had little or no previous exposure to the college environment (Levitz and Noel, 1980, p. 11).

Noel, writing with Levitz and Beal (1985, 1980), suggests ways to increase retention of adult students. The emphasis needs to be on the quality of education offered, on student

learning, and on satisfaction. The learner needs to be involved in his or her learning experience, and student services need to be improved. Adults need special orientation programs, peer counseling, career development planning, and informed academic advising. These program improvements and shifts in emphasis will enhance the learning environment for adult students and are likely to increase retention in the process.

Research Tools

Learning Orientation

Cyril Houle's classifications of learning orientation were used to organize and analyze PIL students' reasons for pursuing higher education. The following descriptions of these three learner orientations were adapted from Houle's discussion in The Inquiring Mind, 1961.

Goal Orientation. Goal oriented learners are those people who have a specific purpose in mind as they plan and execute their learning. The goal is often something tangible that will bring them some benefit once achieved. This category includes people who want a degree to secure a job, to improve chances for a promotion in their current job, or just to improve the skills necessary in their particular occupation. Just receiving the degree itself may be the goal (credential or licensure). Solving individual problems and pursuing social reform are other possible goals for learners in this group.

Learning Orientation (Learning for Learning's Sake). People in this category have a love of learning that has often endured throughout their lives. They frequently are avid readers and have a high desire for knowledge. They are curious people who seem to want to learn about a multitude of things. An inquiring mind and an urge to discover are characteristics of the learning oriented person. How to use or apply the learning is not as important as the learning itself.

Activity Orientation. For activity oriented learners the attraction of the learning environment often has little to do with the content or process of learning. These people might be seeking activities that will serve as social outlets or places to meet new people. They may be lonely or unhappy in some other aspects of their lives and are looking for learning environments such as classes to provide them with stimulating, comfortable experiences.

Barriers to Participation

The concept of barriers was also used to organize and analyze students' reasons for applying to PIL. Individualized, non-traditional higher education programs have been promoted widely as opportunities that transcend many barriers for pursuing a degree program.

Situational, institutional, and psychosocial (sometimes called dispositional) barriers to educational participation were originally proposed by K. Patricia Cross in her book

Adults as Learners, 1981. The following descriptions were adapted from the work of Cross as well as from the discussion of her book in Adult Education: Foundations of Practice, by Gordon G. Darkenwald and Sharan B. Merriam, 1982.

Institutional barriers. Institutional barriers are those factors outside of the control of the individual learner and involved with the organization or procedures of the educational institution. Examples of institutional barriers include the existence of prerequisites, scheduling arrangements, complex and time-consuming registration procedures, and the lack of services (e.g., counseling, bookstores, libraries) at times convenient for adults.

Situational barriers. These barriers are directly related to the circumstances and situation of the learner. Lack of time or lack of money are two frequently mentioned barriers to participation in educational programs. Other situational barriers include transportation, child care, schedule problems (conflicts with work, home, and community obligations), physical distance from an institution, and physical handicap.

Psychosocial barriers. Learners with psychosocial barriers have individual attitudes or perceptions that dissuade them from participating in further higher education. These people may have had unpleasant earlier schooling experiences, and may therefore dislike structured learning environments. They may have a need for individualized attention in their educational programs.

The learner classification typology and the educational barriers categories were valuable tools for this research project. They provided a clear, cogent framework within which to investigate the relationship between the reasons adults have for pursuing education and their eventual academic success.

Summary

Two key terms were used throughout the PIL research study: retention and academic persistence. Both terms were defined as continued enrollment in degree studies. The definition includes both graduates of PIL and those students who were currently active in the program at the time this study was conducted. Nonpersistence refers to those students who formally discontinued enrollment in PIL, either by voluntary withdrawal or by action of the program to drop them.

The research on retention of adult students in nontraditional degree programs is inconclusive regarding the impact of age on retention and the relationship of the type of first registration after enrollment in degree studies to academic persistence. The studies tend to agree that the greater the amount of past college work completed, the greater the likelihood that adult students will persist to degree completion.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter reviews the methodology used in this research study. First, the sample population is described and a rationale given for using the academic year 1983-84 for this study. Second, the data collection process is discussed, including developing and testing the instruments, the records used, the inter-rater reliability process, and modifications made subsequent to testing the instruments in a pilot project. Next, the methods used for analyzing the data are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study.

The research for this study was conducted at the University of Minnesota Program for Individualized Learning (formerly the University Without Walls). The Program offers a criteria-based baccalaureate degree for mature, independent learners. Students in the program design individualized degree plans which often include a diversity of educational methods and settings, such as on-campus classes, correspondence courses, work-related and prior learning, and independent projects. Learning outcomes are used to show progress toward degree goals and to demonstrate fulfillment of the graduation

criteria. Appendix A provides a more detailed description of the Program for Individualized Learning.

Sample

The sample population selected for this study was the applicant pool for the Program for Individualized Learning in the academic year 1983-84. From fall quarter 1983 through summer session 1984, 112 applications were reviewed by the PIL admissions committee. Eighty-four (75 percent) of these applicants were admitted to PIL, and 67 (59.8 percent) enrolled. Before students can be fully enrolled in PIL, they must secure a faculty area specialist who has agreed to work with them throughout their degree studies. Most of the students who were admitted but did not enroll in PIL were unable to secure a University of Minnesota area specialist. Of the 67 people who did enroll in the program, 36 (53.7 percent) had been dropped by PIL or had voluntarily withdrawn by the end of summer session, 1987. Ten students (14.9 percent) had graduated and 21 students (31.3 percent) were still actively pursuing their degree work.

Three criteria were used in selecting the year 1983-84 for this research project. First, PIL was a substantially different program before 1983, since different admissions and graduation criteria were in effect. In addition, the administrative structure of the program changed to involve more faculty in program governance and administration. The changes

in effect after 1983 represent more closely the current program structures and criteria.

A second criterion for selecting 1983-84 was staff stability. All of the academic advisers who served the students admitted during that academic year were still with the program at the beginning of this study. This was an important factor because follow-up interviews with advisers were an integral part of this research project.

Third, the number of applications received during the four quarters studied was at about the mid-point of the range of applications received each year since PIL/UWW's inception in 1972. During the mid-1970s, more than two hundred applications were reviewed annually. This number has steadily decreased as PIL focussed its mission and refined its admission standards. Since 1985, PIL has been under a mandate from central administration to limit enrollments. Consequently, enrollment figures have continued to decline. The 112 applications received during 1983-84 is an approximate average of the number of applications received per year in PIL over the last 15 years.

The research project includes the collection of registration data for the sample through summer session, 1987. This cutoff date was selected so that a full four years of data could be available for analysis. Four years allowed enough time for some graduations to occur and for some students to continue to be actively enrolled in PIL. The comparison of

these two groups, as well as of the groups of people who withdrew or were dropped, is an essential component of this research project.

Data Collection

Instrumentation

The first step toward collecting the data for this study was the design and development of two data collection instruments. The first draft of both the student data collection and the adviser interview forms resulted from an assessment of the overall problem to be studied and the specific questions raised by examining different students' experiences.

These initial forms received a careful critique by the faculty adviser on this project. Modifications were suggested in both the scope of the research and the format for data collection. For example, the inital data form did not have a category for collecting information about students' reasons for pursuing higher education, although this information was available on most PIL applications. An established learner typology, such as Cyril Houle's learning orientations, was then reviewed as a means to classify this information. Because non-traditional students often cite the absence of barriers as reasons for seeking the PIL degree, a typology of barriers to participation was also considered (Cross, 1981, p. 98). These two typologies were subsequently incorporated into the revised

data form. The adviser interview form was expanded to include comments about the regularity of adviser/advisee communication and to solicit information about the relative importance of eight specific topics in advising sessions.

Numerous format and style changes were also made. For example, the format was revised so that the status of the student program being researched was immediately apparent. Wording was changed to be more precise, such as specifying quarters and number of past credits rather than just the number of years of prior postsecondary study. Some questions were reworded to elicit more precise answers, and other questions were moved from the data form to the adviser interview form so the most accurate information could be obtained.

This format change resulted in the definition of the categories used for the framework of this study: Admitted, Enrolled, Dropped/Withdrawn, Graduated, or Currently Active. Admitted students were those whose applications were found acceptable by the PIL Admissions Committee. Enrolled students were those who were admitted and who subsequently registered and paid fees for at least one quarter in the PIL program. Students terminated by the program because of failure to register and/or lack of academic progress were labeled as dropped; those who voluntarily ended their PIL enrollment were labeled as withdrawn. Currently active students were those enrolled students who continued to register each quarter and who showed academic progress. Graduates included all those who

had met with their graduation committees and been recommended for the baccalaureate degree.

The revised forms were critiqued by key PIL staff members, including the program director, the admissions coordinator, and the executive assistant. Further changes were again made. Although the changes in actual content were not extensive, the format, wording, and visual layout of the forms improved. Questions were added that might give further insight into retention patterns. For example, a question was added that dealt with reasons for withdrawing from the program; in addition, the area specialist was identified, and changes in the assignment of academic advisers were noted.

After this second revision, the forms were reviewed by the full academic staff of PIL (six advisers). This review generated further changes which strengthened the forms and secured the active involvement of advisers in this research project. An example of a modification suggested by the advisers was to ask for an approximate amount of work completed in the various stages of current student programs (i.e., 25 percent, 50 percent, 75 percent), rather than asking advisers to go back to each student's degree plan for specific percentages.

Validity

In all of these reviews, the primary goal was to develop instruments that would collect the desired data. This goal was achieved through careful review and revision of the instruments with subject experts including academic advisers, program administrators, and a professor of adult education.

Reliability

The researcher and the PIL admissions coordinator collected the data over a one-month period. The first step in the data collection process was an inter-rater reliability test. Twenty applications were reviewed separately by both researchers and their responses on the data forms were compared for consistency. Some inconsistencies were found in the classification of reasons for seeking higher education and for applying to PIL. Some modifications were then made in the data collection form to correct these inconsistencies. Specifically, the following changes were made: 1) whenever appropriate, the number of years of professional and volunteer experience was listed in one category labeled concurrent experience; 2) if a reason for pursuing higher education was to prepare for graduate or professional school, this was noted in the "other" category; 3) if the applicants discussed their commitment to a liberal education, this was interpreted to mean a desire for knowledge (an inquiring mind); 4) "use of prior learning" as a reason for applying to PIL was expanded on the form to include

prior and experiential learning; 5) the category for using independent study methods was expanded to include independent and self-directed study methods; and 6) physical handicaps were expanded to include learning disabilities.

Ten applications beyond the initial 20 used for inter-rater reliability were reviewed and the ratings were compared for consistency. There were no inconsistencies between these ratings. Also, consultation between the raters occurred frequently as all the remaining applications were rated. Questions were resolved through mutual assessment.

A third and final revision of the forms resulted in the instruments used throughout the remainder of the project for data collection purposes. See Appendix B for copies of the final forms.

Sources of Data and Data Collection

The records used in this project include PIL student applications, the students' files, the quarterly registration data for each student for the duration of her or his active enrollment in PIL, and the information collected from each student's adviser through the interview process. Information collected from the application included quarter and year of application, sex, age, residence, past postsecondary education, past experience related to the proposed area of concentration, reasons for seeking further education, and reasons for applying to PIL.

For students who did not complete their degree programs, the percentage of work completed before leaving the program was ascertained from the students' files. For all students in the sample, the student's original adviser and any changes in adviser during the student's PIL enrollment were determined through a review of the files.

Quarterly registration records were used to calculate how much time each student spent in the various program stages, including degree planning, program implementation, major project, graduation dossier preparation, and graduation review. The information collected included the number of quarters in each stage and the quarter completed.

The adviser interview collected information on the nature of the advising relationship and on the extent and type of work completed by each student. Advisers gave approximate percentages regarding the forms of communication used with the student (in-person meetings, phone consultations, and correspondence), an estimation of frequency of communication (weekly, monthly, quarterly, 2-3 times per year), and a general description of the pattern of communication (regular or irregular). Data were collected on the content of advising sessions by asking advisers to rate the attention given to the topics of goal setting, prior learning, project selection, personal problems, registration, time management, financial aid, and the student's responsibility for her or his own education. Advisers indicated approximately what percentage of

courses and projects had been completed for students currently active and for those who were dropped or withdrew before entering the graduation stage. For those students who reached the graduation stage, advisers indicated what tasks had been completed. Information was also collected on seminars the student had attended and on advisers' perceptions of the reasons for students withdrawing or being dropped from the program.

Due to the extensiveness of the information collected, the project needed the approval of the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research. The application was reviewed and final approval was given on November 24, 1987 (see Appendix C). Stipulations from the committee included using only number or letter codes as identifying information and keeping the records in a locked office.

Data Analysis

The researchers hand-tabulated the data from four sources: the application forms, the quarterly registration records, the student files, and the adviser interview forms. The data were organized and analyzed primarily using elementary statistical methods. Comparisons of data among the three classifications of student programs (graduated, currently active, and dropped/withdrawn) provided the information most relevant to the overall topic of retention. Frequencies were used to reveal patterns within certain categories such as age ranges.

Simple averages and means were calculated to gain access to useful general information. Rankings were used in the analysis of reasons for higher education and barriers to learning.

A classifications system was used to categorize student academic progress in the PIL program. Students moved through five stages during their PIL enrollment:

Degree Planning. This stage occurs immediately after admission to PIL. Students, with the help of advisers, an on-campus seminar, and a correspondence course if necessary, conceptualize, design, and write an individualized degree plan which addresses the required PIL graduation criteria. The plan includes all relevant past and proposed courses, experiential learning, and directed study projects. Students must have a degree plan approved by the PIL degree plan review committee before they can proceed with their programs.

Program Implementation. After the degree plan is approved, students undertake the actual courses, projects, and prior learning evaluations listed in their degree plans. The program implementation stage covers the length of time it takes them to complete the work.

Major Project. All students must complete a major project in their area of concentration before graduation from PIL. This project generally is done as the last task of program implementation.

Graduation Dossier Preparation. After all the work of the degree program is completed, including the major project,

students write a final integrative essay called the statement of readiness; they then compile a dossier of materials representative of their academic achievements. These materials are assessed by a preliminary review committee, which must approve the graduation dossier before it can be submitted to the final graduation committee.

Graduation Review. This stage of PIL students' programs culminates in the graduation committee meeting, which generally results in the awarding of the B.A. or B.S. degree.

These classifications provided the framework for determining how much progress students made over a specified period of time and/or how much progress was made prior to dropping or withdrawing from the program.

Limitations

This research project has a number of limitations. For example, it focuses on one specific year of PIL admissions. All the findings necessarily reflect only that year. Other periods of time would undoubtedly yield different information. Therefore, the results of this study can only be interpreted with the acknowledgement of this limitation.

The instruments for the collection of data have certain limitations. Although the instruments were scrutinized by various professionals in education and were tested for inter-rater reliability, some of the data by its nature required some

judgments to be made on the part of the researchers. Not all of the data collected were strictly objective and quantifiable.

The data analysis also had some limitations. Tests of statistical significance were not done; this factor also limits the extent to which the results can be generalized. In addition, some questions asked of advisers focused specifically on perceptions and approximations, so the data must be presented in that way.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The results of this research project are reported in this chapter. The findings are grouped into six categories: admissions and retention information, demographic data, learning orientation as a reason for higher education, reasons for selecting PIL in terms of barriers to education, academic progress by stage in program, and the relationship between adviser behavior and retention. Results are reported narratively as well as in corresponding tables.

Admissions and Retention Information

A quarterly breakdown of admissions data for the four quarters studied (fall, 1983 and winter, spring, and summer session, 1984), and a summary of the current status of all students who actually enrolled are presented in Table 1. Of the 112 applicants, 84 were admitted. Seventeen who were admitted did not enroll in the program, leaving a sample of 67 enrollees (60 percent of the applicants) in the study. Almost one-half (n = 31; 46.3 percent) of those students admitted and enrolled during the 1983-84 year were retained in or had graduated from the program as of fall quarter, 1987.

TABLE 1

Admission Actions, Current Status, and Retention Rates of PIL Students, Fall Quarter 1983 through Summer Session 1984

	FQ83	WQ84	SQ84	SS84	
	N	N	N	N	N
Admission Action					
Applications	40	34	17	21	112
Rejected	11	10	2	5	28
Admitted	29	24	15	16	84
Admitted, Never Enrolled	6	5	2	4	17
Current Status of Enrollees as of September, 1987					
Enrolled in Program	23	19	13	12	67
Graduated	5	4	1	0	10
Currently Active	7	7	3	4	21
Dropped/Withdrawn	11	8	9	8	36
Rate of Retention of Enrollees*	52.2%	57.9%	30.8%	33.3%	46.3%

*Retention rate computed as $\frac{\text{Currently Active + Graduates}}{\text{Admitted - Never Enrolled}}$

The retention rates for winter and fall quarter enrollees were the highest for the period studied. The spring quarter rate reflects a drop of over 20 percent in the rate of retention in comparison with the previous two quarters.

In order to provide some context for these enrollment data and retention rates, similar information was collected for the years 1980-87. These data are summarized in Table 2. With one exception, the rate of retention increased with each year. The retention rates for the most recent years are obviously higher since some students may withdraw or be dropped within the coming quarters or years.

Of those students admitted in 1983-84 who subsequently dropped or withdrew, the average length of time in the program was 6.1 quarters. The range of time they spent in the program was from one to ten quarters. If ten quarters (2.5 years) is determined to be an approximate outer limit of time in which people withdraw or are dropped from the program, then the retention rates for the 1983-84 academic year and earlier can be accepted as a relative standard for student retention in a non-traditional baccalaureate degree program.

Demographic Data

Age. The ages of students at the point of admission were tabulated using six categories. The age of enrolled students who subsequently graduated, were dropped or withdrew, or are currently active is summarized in Table 3. The age of the

TABLE 2

Enrollment Data and Retention Rates, 1980-87

Years	Number Admitted/ Enrolled	Dropped/ Withdrawn	Currently Active	Grads	Percent Retained
1980-81	75	52	0	23	30.7
1981-82	57	33	5	19	42.1
1982-83	70	42	10	18	40.0
1983-84	67	36	21	10	46.3
1984-85	69	26	36	7	62.3
1985-86	56	11	43	2	80.4
1986-87	41	2	37	2	94.9

TABLE 3

Persistence by Age

	Age Category				
	18-25	26-32	33-39	40-46	47+
Status	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Enrolled n=67	18 (26.9)	12 (17.9)	18 (26.9)	16 (23.9)	3 (4.5)
Dropped/ withdrawn n=36	10 (27.8)	7 (19.5)	8 (22.2)	9 (25.0)	2 (5.6)
Graduates n=10	3 (30.0)	3 (30.0)	1 (10.0)	2 (20.0)	1 (10.0)
Currently Active n=21	5 (23.8)	2 (9.5)	9 (42.9)	5 (23.8)	--
Combined Grad and Currently Active n=31	8 (25.8)	5 (16.1)	10 (32.3)	7 (22.6)	1 (3.2)
Persistence Rate*	44.4%	41.7%	55.6%	43.8%	33.3%

*$\frac{\text{Graduates + Currently Active}}{\text{N for Age Category}}$

graduates and currently active students as a group was also calculated because these groups, taken together, define academic persistence for the purposes of this study.

Age does not seem to be a factor that is related to persistence in the program, although the 33-39 age group had the highest persistence rate (55.6 percent). The largest groups of enrolled students fell into the 18-25 and 33-46 age ranges. The program did not enroll many people over the age of 46; only three of the 67 enrolled students in the sample were 47 years or older.

Gender. In Table 4, information is presented regarding the gender of students who enrolled in PIL during 1983-84. Men and women enrolled in the program in nearly equal numbers. Women persisted in their academic studies at a slightly higher rate than men: 48.5 percent of the women and 44.1 percent of the men persisted.

Residence. PIL enrolls substantially more local students than students living outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The place of residence of students in groupings related to enrollment status is shown in Table 5.

Of the 67 students enrolling in PIL during 1983-84, 50 lived in the Twin Cities at time of enrollment. PIL attempts to overcome the barriers present in distance learning, and therefore the structure of the program allows students to pursue their degree goals while living outside the metropolitan area. Seventeen students enrolling in PIL during 1983-84 lived

TABLE 4

Persistence by Gender

Status	Gender			
	Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%
Enrolled (n=67)	34	50.7	33	49.3
Dropped/withdrawn (n=36)	19	52.7	17	47.2
Graduated (n=10)	4	40.0	6	60.0
Currently Active (n=21)	11	52.4	10	47.6
Combined Grads and Currently Active (n=31)	15	48.4	16	51.6
Persistence Rate*	44.1%		48.5%	

*$\frac{\text{Graduates + Currently Active}}{\text{N for Gender Category}}$

TABLE 5

Persistence by Place of Residence

Status	Place of Residence									
	Twin Cities		Moved (out of TC)		Greater MN		USA		Int'l	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Enrolled (n=67)	44	65.7	6	8.9	6	8.9	10	14.9	1	1.5
Dropped/ withdrawn (n=36)	20	55.6	4	11.1	3	8.3	8	22.2	1	2.8
Graduates (n=10)	9	90.0	0	--	0	--	1	10.0	0	--
Currently Active (n=21)	15	71.4	2	9.5	3	14.3	1	4.8	0	--
Combined Grads and Currently Active (n=31)	24	77.4	2	6.5	3	9.7	2	6.5	0	--
Persistence Rate*	54.5%		33.3%		50.0%		20.0%		--	

*Graduates + Currently Active / N for Residence Category

outside of the Twin Cities, including six students living in greater Minnesota, ten students residing in other states, and one international student.

Six of the Twin Cities enrollees subsequently moved to locations at a considerable distance from the campus. Therefore, of the original 67 enrollees, 23 (34.3 percent) were considered distant students at the point when these data were collected. An analysis of these 23 students revealed that almost 70 percent (n = 16) of the students who lived at a distance from campus withdrew or were dropped from their degree programs. The drop/withdrawal rate for local students was considerably lower: 20 of the 44 local students, or 45.5 percent, did not complete their degree programs through PIL. Students who moved away from the Twin Cities did not fare as well: of the six people who relocated outside the metropolitan area, 4 (66.6 percent) discontinued their degree work.

Prior Post-Secondary Education. The past post-secondary education of students who enrolled in PIL from fall 1983 through summer 1984 is presented in Table 6. The data are reported in quarter credit hours. An additional category covers other formal educational experiences such as nursing certificates, technical-vocational school credits, and theatre training.

Students with less than 46 credits (one year of college) comprised 23.9 percent of the sample (n=16). Students with 46 quarter credits or more at the point of admission had a higher

TABLE 6

Persistence by Prior Postsecondary Education

Status	Number of Credits at Admission												Other Educ.
	0		1-45		46-90		91-135		136-180		180+		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Enrolled (n=67)	5	7.5	11	16.4	24	35.8	16	23.9	8	11.9	3	4.8	15
Dropped/ withdrawn (n=36)	3	8.3	9	25.0	11	30.6	8	22.2	4	11.1	1	2.8	6
Graduated (n=10)	0	--	0	--	3	30.0	4	40.0	1	10.0	2	20.0	4
Currently Active (n=21)	2	9.5	2	9.5	10	47.6	4	19.0	3	14.3	0	--	5
Combined Grads and Currently Active (n=31)	2	6.5	2	6.5	13	41.9	8	25.8	4	12.9	2	6.5	9
Persistence Rate*	40.0%		18.2%		54.2%		50.0%		50.0%		66.7%		60.0%

*Graduates + Currently Active / N for Credit Category

rate of retention (n=51; 76.1 percent of sample). All students who graduated had a year or more of prior college (46 credits or more) at the point of admission to PIL.

Only four (25 percent) of the students with less than one year of college at admission (less than 46 credits) were currently active; none had graduated. Twelve students (75 percent) who were subsequently dropped or withdrew had less than one year of prior college experience.

Graduates and current students were more likely than students who dropped or withdrew to have had two or more years (91 credits or more) of past college work. Of the 31 students who graduated or are currently active, 14 people (45.2 percent) had two or more years of past college. Of the 36 students who dropped or withdrew from the program, 13 people (36.1 percent) had two or more years of past formal education.

Graduates and currently enrolled students also had more other types of educational experience than students who later dropped or withdrew from PIL. Of the combined graduates and currently active students, 29 percent had other forms of educational experience compared to only 16.6 percent of students who later dropped or withdrew from the program.

Past Experience. The findings regarding years of professional and volunteer experience related to the areas of concentration of students admitted and enrolled in PIL during 1983-84 are summarized in Tables 7 and 8.

TABLE 7

Persistence by Years of Professional Experience

Related to PIL Area of Concentration

	Years of Experience									
	Less than 1		1-4		5-10		11-15		16+	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Enrolled (n=67)	21	31.3	9	13.4	16	23.9	11	16.4	10	14.9
Dropped/ withdrawn (n=36)	12	33.3	6	16.7	10	27.8	4	11.1	4	11.1
Graduated (n=10)	3	30.0	1	10.0	1	10.0	2	20.0	3	30.0
Currently Active (n=21)	6	28.6	2	9.5	5	23.8	5	23.8	3	14.3
Combined Grads and Currently Active (n=31)	9	29.0	3	9.7	6	19.3	7	22.6	6	19.3
Persistence Rate*	42.9%		33.3%		37.5%		63.6%		60.0%	

*$\frac{\text{Graduates + Currently Active}}{\text{N for Experience Category}}$

TABLE 8

Persistence by Years of Volunteer Experience

Related to PIL Area of Concentration

(With No Concurrent Professional Education in the Field)

Status	Number of Years of Volunteer Experience							
	Less than 1		1-4		5-10		11+	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Enrolled (n=67)	58	86.6	4	6.0	4	6.0	1	1.5
Dropped/ withdrawn (n=36)	32	88.9	0	--	3	8.3	1	2.8
Graduated (n=10)	8	80.0	1	10.0	1	10.0	0	--
Currently Active (n=21)	18	85.7	3	14.3	0	--	0	--
Combined Grads and Currently Active (n=31)	26	83.9	4	12.9	1	3.2	0	--
Persistence Rate*	44.8%		100%		25%		--	

* $\frac{\text{Graduates + Currently Active}}{\text{N for Volunteer Experience Category}}$

Adults often seek out the PIL degree option because they want to apply their learning from past experience as part of their undergraduate studies. For example, for fourteen years, Bonnie was professionally involved in the field of early childhood education. She started as a teachers' aide, advanced to full-time teaching, was promoted to head teacher, and now spends much time training other teachers and directing a child-care program. She was able to incorporate much of this learning into her B.S. program in early childhood education. Similarly, Jim, who had held a number of positions over a ten year period in personnel departments in hospital settings, used this expertise as part of his PIL program in industrial relations.

Eleven or more years of professional experience (or professional experience combined with volunteer work) was related to higher rates of academic persistence and success. Almost 42 percent (n = 13) of graduates and current students had over 10 years of professional experience when they were admitted to PIL, compared to only 22.2 percent (n = 8) of students who later dropped or withdrew.

Students who had under 10 years of professional experience when they were admitted to PIL were more likely eventually to withdraw or be dropped from the program. Slightly under 78 percent (n = 28) of the students who dropped or withdrew from PIL had less than 10 years of experience, whereas 58.1 percent (n = 18) of the graduates and currently active students had ten years or less of professional experience.

Of the 67 students in this study, only nine (13.4 percent) had solely volunteer work (not in combination with professional experience) of at least one year's duration related to their areas of concentration. Of the 67, 46 (68.7 percent) had a year or more of related professional experience, often in combination with volunteer experience. Five of the nine students (55.5 percent) who had volunteer experience alone had graduated or were currently active students.

Learning Orientation as a Reason for Higher Education

The reasons mentioned on the application forms for pursuing higher education were classified into three learning orientation categories: goal-oriented (GO) reasons, learning for learning's sake (LLS) reasons, and activity-oriented (AO) reasons. The following reasons were listed as goal-oriented: solve individual problem(s), promotion, credential/licensure, secure a job or improve job skills, and social reform. Learning for learning's sake reasons included love of reading/learning, personal curiosity (an urge to discover), and a desire for knowledge (an inquiring mind). Activity-oriented reasons included meeting new people (social outlet), and seeking a comfortable, stimulating situation. A total of 114 reasons were given, including 82 goal-oriented reasons, 31 learning for learning's sake reasons, and one activity-oriented reason.

The data were analyzed in three different ways. First, the number of enrollees mentioning one or more of the three

learning orientations was calculated. These data are summarized in Table 9. A further analysis of the number of reasons mentioned in all three learning orientation categories was also summarized (see Table 10). Finally, a rank ordering of the reasons mentioned, by student status group, was prepared. This information is presented in Table 11.

Students in all groups analyzed (graduates, currently active, and dropped/withdrawn) stated goal-oriented and learning for learning's sake reasons for returning to school. Fifty-nine people (88 percent) mentioned goal-oriented reasons, solely or in combination with other reasons, for seeking higher education. Twenty-six people (38.8 percent) mentioned learning for learning's sake reasons, solely or in combination with other reasons. Only one person (a graduate) mentioned an activity-oriented reason for returning to school.

There is little difference in the persistence rates of enrollees by learning orientation categories. Enrollees listing goal-oriented reasons persisted at a rate of 45.8 percent, and enrollees listing learning for learning's sake reasons persisted at a rate of 46.2 percent. The N for activity orientation is too low to allow for any interpretation of this persistence rate. The data regarding persistence rates of enrollees by learning orientation categories are presented in Table 9.

TABLE 9

Number of Enrollees Mentioning Each of the Learning Orientation Categories*

Status	Learning Orientations					
	Goal Oriented		Learning for Learning's Sake		Activity Oriented	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Enrolled (n=67)	59	88.0	26	38.8	1	1.5
Dropped/withdrawn (n=36)	32	88.0	14	38.9	0	--
Graduates (n=10)	8	80.0	4	40.0	1	10.0
Currently Active (n=21)	19	90.5	8	38.0	0	--
Combined Grads and Currently Active (n=31)	27	87.1	12	38.7	1	3.2
Persistence Rate**	45.8%		46.2%		100%	

*Because many enrollees mentioned reasons in more than one category, percentages will total more than 100.

** $\frac{\text{Graduates and Currently Active}}{\text{N for Learning Orientation Category}}$

TABLE 10

Number of Reasons for Higher Education

by Learning Orientation

Status	Learning Orientations: Goal Oriented N	%	Learning for Learning's Sake N	%	Activity Oriented N	%
Enrolled (n=114 reasons)	82	71.9	31	27.2	1	.9
Dropped/withdrawn (n=59 reasons)	43	72.9	16	27.1	0	--
Graduates (n=19 reasons)	14	73.7	4	21.0	1	5.3
Currently Active (n=36 reasons)	25	69.4	11	30.5	0	--
Combined Grads and Currently Active (n=55 reasons)	39	70.9	15	27.3	1	1.2
Persistence Rate*	47.6%		48.4%		100%	

* Graduates and Currently Active / N for Learning Orientation Category

TABLE 11

Reasons for Further Education by Student Status
(multiple reasons given by each enrollee)

	Category	N	Percent
Graduates (n = 10)			
Credentials/licensure	GO	6	60.0
Secure job/improve job skills	GO	5	50.0
Love of learning	LLS	2	20.0
Desire for knowledge	LLS	2	20.0
Social reform	GO	2	20.0
Seek comfortable environment	A0	1	10.0
Promotion	GO	1	10.0
Currently Active (n= 21)			
Credential/licensure	GO	14	66.7
Desire for knowledge	LLS	7	33.3
Secure job/improve skills	GO	4	19.0
Social reform	GO	4	19.0
Promotion	GO	3	14.3
Love of learning	LLS	2	9.5
Personal curiosity	LLS	2	9.5
Dropped/withdrawn (n = 36)			
Credential/licensure	GO	23	63.9
Secure job/improve job skills	GO	14	38.9
Desire for knowledge	LLS	9	25.0
Love of learning	LLS	6	16.7
Promotion	GO	3	8.3
Social reform	GO	3	8.3
Personal curiosity	LLS	1	2.8

Goal-Oriented Reasons

The strong goal orientation of PIL learners is reflected in the total number and percentages of reasons which fall into this category. A summary of the number of reasons for higher education by learner orientation categories is shown in Table 10. Of all reasons mentioned, 71.9 percent (n = 82) were goal oriented. The persistence rate of enrollees mentioning goal-oriented reasons for pursuing higher education was 47.6 percent.

Of the goal oriented reasons, the desire for a credential was the most frequently listed reason for all categories of students. Of the 67 applications analyzed for this study, 43 people (64.2 percent) indicated the desire for the degree as at least one reason for returning to school. A rank ordering, by category of student, of reasons for pursuing higher education is presented in Table 11.

Graduates, current students, and drops/withdrawals differed slightly in their goal orientation. Drops/withdrawals listed only goal-oriented reasons most frequently, with 61.1 percent (22 students) giving such reasons. Goal-oriented reasons alone were listed by 57.1 percent of currently active students (12) and 50 percent of graduates (5).

Learning for Learning's Sake Reasons

All groups of students analyzed also listed learning for learning's sake as a reason for returning to school. Of the

114 reasons mentioned, 31 (27.2 percent) fall into the category of learning for learning's sake. The persistence rate of enrollees mentioning learning for learning's sake reasons for pursuing higher education was 48.4 percent.

Activity-Oriented Reasons

Out of all 67 applications reviewed, only one activity oriented reason for returning to school was noted. One graduate mentioned the desire to become involved in a comfortable, stimulating environment.

Summary of Learning Orientation

Little relationship exists between learning orientations and persistence rate of enrollees. The difference in persistence rates by learner orientation categories of graduates and currently active students, and students who were dropped or withdrew, is less than one percentage point. However, there is a slight difference in the goal orientation of students who persist and those who do not. Students who eventually drop or withdraw from PIL more frequently list only goal-oriented reasons for pursuing a degree.

Reasons for Selecting PIL in Terms of Barriers to Education

The PIL application form asks prospective students to discuss why they think PIL is an appropriate education option to meet their needs. For purposes of this research study, the

responses were reframed as educational barriers which students wanted to overcome. Three categories of educational barriers were used: institutional, situational, and psychosocial. Institutional barriers included the following: the desired area of concentration was not available elsewhere in the institution; the student wanted to use prior and experiential learning in the degree program; and the use of independent study methods was a desired mode of learning. Situational barriers included conflicts with work, home, and community obligations; physical and learning disabilities; and physical distance from campus. Psychosocial barriers included the need for individualized attention and a dislike of structured learning environments. The research examined the relationship of educational barriers and persistence rates in PIL.

Current students and graduates mentioned more institutional barriers (68.7 percent) than situational ones (29 percent). This pattern was similar for students who later dropped or withdrew; however, the dropped/withdrew group gave fewer institutional reasons and more situational reasons than the graduates/current students. These findings are summarized in Table 12.

Overcoming institutional barriers appears to be a factor associated with persistence in PIL. This is congruent with the nature of a non-traditional, individualized higher education program. Institutional barriers include those factors which

TABLE 12

Reasons for Selecting PIL in Terms of Barriers to Education

	Combined Grads and Current Students (N = 83 reasons)		Dropped/ Withdrawn (N = 93 reasons)	
	N	%	N	%
Institutional	57	68.7	53	57.0
Situational	24	29.0	37	39.8
Psychosocial	2	2.4	3	3.2

PIL by its very structure is designed to overcome. For example, the use of prior learning in a degree program, the recognition of students' desire to study independently, and access to a particular area of concentration not offered through traditional degree programs are all examples of how PIL assists students to overcome barriers to participation. PIL provides some alternatives to these barriers, depending in the specific nature of individual student programs.

It is more difficult for the program actively to address situational barriers, which include conflicts with home, work, and community obligations. Some barriers such as, physical handicaps, learning disabilities, and distance from campus can be accommodated to a greater or lesser extent by PIL. Lack of persistence in PIL appears to be related to the presence of situational barriers that may be outside the control of the progam and the institution.

Psychosocial barriers do not appear to be a factor in persistence in PIL. Only five reasons for pursuing PIL were classified as overcoming psychosocial barriers; two were mentioned by current students and three were given by students who later dropped or withdrew from the program.

The impact on retention of institutional versus situational barriers is further explained when specific reasons are analyzed. In Table 13, the ranking of reasons listed by graduates and current students is compared with the ranking of reasons listed by those who later dropped or withdrew from PIL.

Students are more likely to persist in their academic work if they have prior and experiential learning they want to include in their programs. Students are more likely to drop out of the program if they have more conflicts with their home, work, and school schedules. They are also more likely to drop if they perceive distance as an important reason for applying, and if they put more emphasis on independent study.

Students also differed in the role the area of concentration plays in the selection of a degree program. Only 25 percent (n = 9) of the students who later dropped or withdrew mentioned the desire for access to an area of concentration not offered elsewhere in the institution. Forty-two percent (n = 13) of the graduates and current students mentioned this reason in their applications.

TABLE 13

Specific Reasons Mentioned for Applying to PIL

(N = 176 reasons)

	Graduates and Current Students (N=83 reasons)			Dropped/ Withdrawn (N=93 reasons)		
	N	%	Rank	N	%	Rank
Wants to use prior/ experiential learning in program (I)	28	90.3	1	21	58.3	3
Conflicts with schedule (S)	20	64.5	2	27	75.0	1
Desires independent study method of learning (I)	16	51.6	3	23	63.9	2
Area of concentration not offered at U of M (I)	13	42.0	4	9	25.0	4
Distance from campus (S)	4	13.0	5	8	22.2	5
Other	2	6.5	6	5	13.9	6

Academic Progress by Stage in Program

Quarterly registration records and information from adviser interviews were used to determine the approximate amount of work completed by all students in each program stage. Graduates, who obviously had completed all degree work, were excluded from this calculation. The amount and type of work completed by students who were dropped or withdrew from the program and by students still actively enrolled is shown in Table 14.

Students in the process of designing and writing their individualized PIL curricula were designated as being in the degree planning stage. Students with approved degree plans who were completing the courses and projects listed in their plans were categorized as in the program implementation stage. Students who had completed all the work listed in their degree plans and were writing the statement of readiness and compiling their dossiers for graduation review were placed in the graduation dossier preparation category.

Adviser assessments were used to determine the percentage of work completed in each stage. For example, if a student proposed four courses and six projects in his/her degree plan and completed five projects and no courses before withdrawing from PIL, the adviser reported that 50 percent of the program implementation stage had been completed. Estimations and approximations from advisers were used to define 25, 50 75, and 100 percent of each program stage.

TABLE 14

Student Progress By Percentage of Program Stage

Stage	Student Status: Current Students (N = 21)	Student Status: Dropped/ Withdrawn (N = 36)
Degree Planning		
Just beginning	--	5 (13.9%)
25 percent	--	5 (13.9%)
50-100 percent	--	--
Total	0	10 (27.8%)
Program Implementation		
Just beginning	--	6 (16.7%)
25 percent	1 (4.8%)	12 (33.3%)
50 percent	1 (4.8%)	3 (8.3%)
75 percent	9 (42.9%)	3 (8.3%)
100 percent	5 (23.8%)	2 (5.5%)
100 percent (including major project)	0	0
Total	16 (76.2%)	26 (72.2%)
Graduation Dossier Preparation		
Just beginning	3 (14.3%)	--
25 percent	1 (4.8%)	--
50-100 percent	1 (4.8%)	--
Total	5 (23.8%)	0

The findings show that students generally leave the program towards the beginning of their studies, rather than near the end. The point at which the largest group of students dropped or withdrew was after completing about 25 percent of their program implementation activities. Only 5.5 percent (n = 2) of the entire group of drops/withdrawals completed all the activities of the program implementation stage, with the exception of the major project. None of the students who dropped or withdrew persisted to the major project, graduation dossier preparation, or graduation review stage. The critical points at which students are likely to withdraw or be dropped are early in either the degree planning or program implementation stages.

Current students appeared to be making progress, albeit slow, on their degree programs. Only one person had not completed at least half or more or the work in the program implementation stage. Almost a quarter of the students were in the graduation dossier preparation stage. The biggest single group of current students (42.9 percent) had completed 75 percent of the work in the program implementation stage.

The last piece of information collected on the data form for this study asked about the assignment of the student's academic adviser. A total of seven adviser changes took place with the 67 enrollees researched. Of these seven changes, five (13.9 percent) were with students who subsequently dropped or withdrew from the program. Four of these five changes were the

result of hiring a temporary adviser to replace an adviser on maternity leave. Two graduates (9.6 percent) had adviser changes during their programs. All current students have worked with the same adviser since their enrollment in PIL. Adviser change appears to have little relationship to the retention rate in PIL.

The Advising Relationship and Retention

In follow-up interviews with advisers, data were collected on type, frequency, and pattern of student/adviser communication, academic progress of students in the program implementation and graduation stages, seminar attendance of students, attention given to specific topics in advising sessions, and advisers' perceptions of students' reasons for dropping or withdrawing from PIL. Data about student/adviser communication, focus of advising sessions, and perceived reasons for drops or withdrawals will be presented in this section. Information about students' academic progress was combined with data collected from quarterly registration records, reported earlier in this chapter. Information about student attendance at PIL seminars was too incomplete to be of value in this research. Records of seminar rosters were not routinely kept, and student files did not always contain information about seminar attendance. Advisers frequently commented that they were unsure which seminars individual students attended.

Student/Adviser Communication

There appeared to be little connection between type and frequency of student/adviser communication and retention. Instead, the types of communication students and advisers use seemed to be determined primarily by the student's place of residence: for local students, in-person meetings were the primary form of communication, with additional phone conversations and correspondence as needed. Students outside the metropolitan area used both phone consultation and correspondence to communicate with their advisers. Some students used the phone more heavily, while others seemed to prefer writing.

Multiple forms of communication between advisers and students was the most common pattern. Of the 67 student programs researched, only six people used exclusively one form of communication with their advisers. Four students who live locally (three who subsequently withdrew or were dropped and one who is currently active) always met with their advisers in person. Two people, both of whom lived outside the five state area, used correspondence as the exclusive method of communicating with their advisers.

Advisers' most common response to the question about frequency of student communication was "it depends." The particular stage of work in which the student is engaged appears to be related to the frequency of communication. When students are writing their degree plans and compiling their

dossiers, they might communicate weekly (or sometimes even more frequently). Even in the less well-defined program implementation stage, students communicated more frequently when they had a problem or other need that had to be addressed.

The data did indicate a relationship between the regularity of communication and student success in PIL. Regularity of communication was defined as communication between adviser and student occurring on a consistent basis, usually no less frequently than once a quarter. Students who routinely kept their advisers informed of their activities were categorized as having a "regular" communication pattern; students who allowed gaps to occur in their contact with their advisers were categorized as having an "irregular" communication pattern.

Advisers reported having regular communication with all students who went on to graduate. Fourteen of the 21 students currently enrolled in PIL have communicated regularly with their advisers. Roughly half (17) of the 36 students who later withdrew or were dropped from the program had irregular communication, as reported by their advisers.

Focus of Advising Sessions

There did not appear to be a relationship between retention and the attention given to topics in individual student sessions as reported by advisers. There was a consistent pattern of attention given to specific topics across

all advisers. More attention was routinely given to such topics as goal setting, prior learning, and project selection. Less attention was consistently given to topics such as registration and financial aid. (Another PIL staff member has primary responsibility for these areas.) The perceived attention given to time management, personal problems, and assuming responsibility for education varies, according to self-reports, from adviser to adviser.

Perceived style of advising varied extensively among advisers. The relative attention different advisers gave to a variety of topics in advising sessions is summarized in Table 15. These data are self reported. Advisers were asked to reflect on their advising styles and to estimate how much

TABLE 15

Percentage of Topics Receiving Different Amounts of Attention by Academic Advisers

	Adviser				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Extensive attention	30.1	39.2	14.6	60.4	18.2
Moderate attention	26.5	13.3	40.6	9.4	26.1
Little attention	19.1	16.7	37.5	17.7	21.6
None	24.3	30.8	7.3	12.5	34.1

attention they gave to each of the eight topics listed. They rated their attention as extensive, moderate, little, or none.

Adviser 1 gave extensive attention to all topics 30.1 percent of the time, moderate attention 26.5 percent of the time, little attention 19.1 percent of the time, and no attention to the topics 24.3 percent of the time. This adviser appeared to alternate between extensive and little or no attention to topics during advising sessions. Adviser 2 had a similar pattern of advising. Extensive attention was given to topics 39.2 percent of the time and no attention was given to topics 30.8 percent of the time. Moderate and little attention were given to topics 13.3 and 16.7 percent of the time respectively. Adviser 3 gave moderate and little attention to topics over 75 percent of the time (40.6 percent and 37.5 percent respectively); topics were covered extensively 14.6 percent of the time and given no attention only 7.3 percent of the time. Adviser 4 frequently covered topics extensively (60.4 percent of the time). Moderate attention was given only 9.4 percent of the time, little attention 17.7 percent of the time, and no attention 12.5 percent of the time. By contrast, Adviser 5 covered few things extensively (18.2 percent of the time). Moderate and little attention was given to topics 26.1 and 21.6 percent of the time respectively.

Persistence rates of individual advisers are summarized in Table 16. The range of rates of retention is from a low of 33.3 percent to a high of 54.5 percent, when presented by rates

TABLE 16

Persistence Rates for Students Admitted and Enrolled During 1983-84, by PIL Adviser

	Adviser				
	1 (N=17)	2 (N=15)	3 (N=12)	4 (N=12)	5 (N=11)
Graduated	2 (11.8)	1 (6.7)	3 (25.0)	2 (16.7)	2 (18.2)
Current	7 (41.2)	6 (40.0)	2 (16.7)	2 (16.7)	4 (36.4)
Dropped/ Withdrawn	8 (47.0)	8 (53.3)	7 (58.3)	8 (66.7)	5 (45.5)
Persistence Rate	52.9%	46.7%	41.7%	33.3%	54.5%

for individual advisers. Although there is over a 20 percent difference in these retention rates, no conclusions can be drawn from these data for two reasons. First, students are not randomly assigned to advisers; advisers select specific students and may take on more high risk students during a particular admission period. Second, the Ns are low, making it difficult to draw any implications from these data.

Advisers' Perceptions of Students' Reasons for Withdrawing or Being Dropped From PIL

Advisers were asked to give their perceptions of the reasons why students withdrew or were dropped from PIL. They were asked to select, from the following list, all of the

reasons that might have affected the student's decision: financial constraints, too great a time commitment, lack of ability to do the program, personal reasons (such as job change or health problems), and change in goals. Advisers did not necessarily indicate a primary reason for program discontinuation.

Advisers perceived personal reasons (health problems, job changes) as factors in students' decisions to withdraw from PIL. Advisers thought such reasons were the primary factors for 18 of the 36 students in the dropped/withdrawn category. Students underestimating the time commitment of the program was mentioned for 15 students. Other reasons suggested were: goals changed (10); financial constraints (9); and lack of ability, student moved, student found more appropriate program (4 each).

These explanations for student non-persistence are the perceptions of academic advisers and not student reported data. Accurate reports of reasons for student attrition are difficult to obtain. Adults may give socially acceptable reasons for withdrawing from higher education rather than acknowledge other more sensitive areas that affected their educational decisions (Cross, 1981, p. 102).

Discussion

The literature review reported an inconclusive relationship between age of students and academic persistence.

The research conducted on PIL students also found no association between age and success in the program.

This research on PIL students did confirm the findings in the literature review regarding the relationship between previous educational attainment and academic persistence. Students with one or two years of past college credit were more likely to persist to graduation than students with little or no past college. As Levitz and Noel suggest, the special needs of academically inexperienced students must be evaluated. PIL must determine what kinds of advising and support services this population needs to accomplish the goal of degree completion.

Past professional experience related to the area of concentration is associated with retention. Over 60 percent of students with more than ten years of past professional experience persist in their degree studies. A surprising finding regarding past professional work is the rate of retention of students with less than one year of professional experience. Almost 43 percent of students with little or no experience persisted in PIL. One possible explanation is that these are younger students who have not had enough time in their lives to accrue professional expertise, but have been involved in the academic environment, which gave them the necessary background to succeed in PIL.

Learning orientation does not appear to be related to persistence in PIL. However, all students who enroll in PIL are strongly goal-oriented, frequently in combination with an

orientation towards learning for learning's sake. Students do not enroll in PIL for activity-oriented reasons.

The only difference noted among the three categories of students studied was in the number of students listing only goal oriented reasons for returning to school. Drops/ withdrawals were more likely to mention solely goal-oriented reasons for pursuing higher education than students who graduated or were currently active.

PIL can help students overcome institutional barriers more readily than situational ones. For example, the program is structured to accommodate students who want to use prior and experiential learning toward their degrees. Furthermore, students in PIL can design an individualized area of concentration. By comparison, it is much more difficult for the program to help students overcome situational barriers such as conflicts with home, work, and community obligations; physical handicaps or learning disabilities; and distance from campus.

Students who are solely interested in the degree for goal oriented reasons, and who have other characteristics such as little past college and/or professional experience, are at high risk in terms of achieving academic success in PIL. These students are at an additional disadvantage if they face situational barriers out of the control of PIL.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The purposes of this chapter are to summarize briefly the research study on retention of students in the Program for Individualized Learning (PIL) at the University of Minnesota, and to discuss the implications of the findings. First, the initial problem and purposes of the study are reviewed. Second, an overview of the methodology and findings is presented. Next, implications of the findings for various audiences are analyzed. The chapter concludes with a revisionist view of the student profiles presented in Chapter One. How might Faith, Bob, and Jane be served differently by PIL given the results of this research study?

Statement of Problem and Purpose

This research addresses the issue of student retention in an individualized non-traditional baccalaureate degree program for adult students. What are some of the variables involved in students' ultimate success or failure? Why are some people more likely than others to persist until graduation? Are there any factors associated with student attrition that emerge?

The first purpose of this study was to calculate the rate of retention of PIL for one selected academic year. Retention

was defined as graduation from the program or currently active in pursuing work toward the degree. Second,the study investigated a variety of factors that might relate to this retention rate. Specifically, the study examined certain student characteristics and learning orientations to see if they were related to academic persistence. In addition, the study included an investigation of the extent to which academic persistence was associated with such factors as age, gender, past educational and professional experience, and barriers and motivations for pursuing a PIL baccalaureate degree. The relationship of adviser behavior to retention patterns was also examined.

Methodology

This research project included a review of the 112 applications submitted to PIL during the 1983-84 academic year. Sixty-seven applicants were admitted and subsequently enrolled in PIL. The applications from these students were examined to determine demographic information and to assess perceived barriers to pursuing education and the students' orientations to learning. Further investigation of each student's program revealed his or her registration pattern, the status of his or her program four years later (graduated, currently active, or dropped/ withdrew), and the last stage of program successfully completed. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with

academic advisers to investigate any links between adviser behavior and retention.

Findings were reported in six categories: enrollment data, demographic information, learning orientation (i.e., reason for pursuing higher education), reasons for selecting PIL which were means to overcoming barriers to participation in education, academic progress by stage of program, and the relationship between adviser behavior and retention.

Findings and Conclusions

Enrollment Data

Slightly less than half (n=31; 46.3 percent) of those students admitted and enrolled in PIL during the 1983-84 academic year were retained in, or had graduated from, the program as of fall quarter, 1987. This retention rate was higher than the rates for the three years previous to 1983-84 (30.7 percent; 42.1 percent; 40.0 percent). The retention rate for the following year (1984-85) was 62.3 percent.

The sample population studied included students ranging in age from 19 to 59; the largest group of enrolled students fell into the 33-46 age range. Men and women enrolled in the program in nearly equal numbers (33 women, 34 men). Fifty students (75 percent) lived in the Twin Cities metropolitan area at the time of enrollment; six students (8.9 percent) lived in greater Minnesota; ten students (14.7 percent) lived

in other states; and one student (1.5 percent) lived outside of the United States.

Demographic Information and Academic Persistence

The age and gender of PIL students did not appear to be factors in academic persistence. The lowest persistence rate was for students in the 26-32 age range (41.7 percent). The highest rate of persistence was for students 33-39 (55.7 percent). Women persisted in their academic studies at a slightly higher rate than men: 48.5 percent of the women and 44.1 percent of the men persisted.

Retention was associated with place of residence. Almost 70 percent of the students who lived at a distance from the campus did not complete their degree programs. By comparison, under half (45.5 percent) of the students who lived in the Twin Cities did not complete their PIL degree work.

Students with one or more years of past post-seondary education had higher rates of retention. All students who graduated had a year or more of prior college at the point of admission to PIL. Two or more years of past college coursework were more usual for graduates and current students (45.2 percent; n = 14) than for students who dropped or withdrew (36.1 percent; n = 13).

Students with ten years or more of professional experience related to their area of concentration persisted at a higher rate than their less experienced peers (62 percent compared to

38 percent). However, almost 43 percent of students with little or no prior professional experience also persisted in PIL.

Learning Orientation and Academic Persistence

PIL students in all categories (graduates, currently active, and drops/withdrawals) were goal-oriented (n=59; 88 percent). The desire for the credential was the most frequently listed reason for students' pursuit of higher education (n=43; 64 percent). Students also pursued learning for learning's sake; slightly over 27 percent of the reasons listed for higher education fell into this category. Only one student (.9 percent) gave reasons for participating in PIL that were classified as activity oriented. Students who were subsequently dropped by the program or who withdrew from their studies listed only goal oriented reasons more frequently than students who persisted in PIL (61.1 percent versus 54.8 percent).

Academic Persistence and Overcoming Barriers to Education

Persistence in PIL was related to reasons that overcome barriers to participation that students have for selecting this particular degree program. Current students and graduates mentioned more institutional barriers (68.7 percent) than situational ones (29 percent) for applying to PIL; students who later dropped or withdrew listed fewer institutional (57

percent) and more situational (40 percent) barriers than graduates and current students.

The desire for a specific area of concentration as a reason for applying to PIL was mentioned by 42 percent (n=13), compared to only 25 percent of students who eventually withdrew or were dropped from PIL.

The perception of situational barriers was more predictive of nonpersistence in PIL than the perception of institutional barriers. Overcoming psychosocial barriers (as a reason for applying to the PIL program) was cited by only 5 (7.5 percent) enrollees.

Adviser Behavior and Retention

Adviser behavior appeared to have little overall effect on retention. The range in persistence rates was from 33.3 percent to 54.4 percent for five advisers.

A connection was apparent, however, between academic persistence and regularity of communication. Advisers reported having regular communication (i.e., consistently informing advisers of their activities) with all students who went on to graduate. Fourteen of the 21 students currently enrolled in PIL have had regular communication with their advisers. Roughly one-half (17 of 36) of students who later withdrew or were dropped had irregular communication, as reported by their advisers.

Implications

Implications for Students Served

This research study raises some questions about the student population best served by PIL, as the program is currently structured. Students who live at a distance from campus need to assess their commitment to this type of degree program and to recognize their skills and limitations in light of program expectations. If prospective students who live at a distance from campus have poor writing skills, appear to have limited access to academic resources such as libraries, and/or have difficulty constructing an independent learning project, they should probably be directed to other educational options that are better prepared to serve their needs.

Students who live at a distance from campus, have little past formal college work, and have less than ten years of related professional experience, are undoubtedly a high risk population for PIL to serve. PIL should consider not admitting these students to the program, and instead refer them to other more appropriate and accessible educational programs. These less experienced enrollees may need special guidance in selecting the degree program that is most suited to their educational needs.

Prospective students and PIL advisers also need to analyze students' reasons for pursuing higher education. Although a high level of goal orientation can be expected of adults enrolling in degree studies, a love of learning for learning's

sake also appears to be an integral feature of academic success in this program. The PIL application form could be revised to ask direct questions about students' learning orientations. If students are solely interested in the degree for goal-oriented reasons, they may need to be led through a process of investigating all other appropriate educational programs. If PIL remains their choice for degree studies, the program should consider designing special workshops for this group. Workshop topics might include: lifelong and self-directed learning, orientation to learning styles, and the development of academic thinking and writing skills.

The current PIL structure seems to serve certain types of students very well. Adults who perceive institutional barriers as serious impediments to learning and who have some grounding in both the academic and the professional environment do well in PIL. Although age alone does not appear to affect academic success, younger students are probably not disadvantaged by their lack of professional experience if it is balanced with a familiarity with the academic environment through past educational achievement.

PIL is currently considering structures and special learning opportunities that further challenge this group of academically sophisticated students. An honors program is being designed that would recognize the academic accomplishments of deserving students. Two merit awards are currently available to PIL students, also in recognition of

academic excellence. Advisers should continue to promote these opportunities and awards to appropriate PIL students.

Implications for Academic Advisers

The results of this research project have implications for academic advising at a number of stages in student programs. At the preadmission stage, advisers need to raise some potentially sensitive questions with prospective students. If students have had little or no past college, how can they obtain that exposure and experience before entering or in the very beginning stages of their degree programs? What academic skills do they have? What kind of support systems are available for developing needed academic skills? What is the nature and extent of their professional experience related to their proposed area of concentration? What have they learned that might be applicable in an academic degree program? Advisers must also explore with students their reasons for pursuing higher education to attempt to determine the level of their commitment to learning as well as their goal orientation.

If the answers to the above questions indicate that a prospective student is at risk for undertaking PIL degree studies, the program could develop a pre-enrollment option that would allow students access to academic advisers and services without the pressure of formal program enrollment and subsequent involvement in degree planning. Students with little past college could be directed to appropriate courses,

either at the University of Minnesota or at other institutions such as community colleges or state universities. If prospective students are weak in academic skills, PIL could offer pre-admissions research and writing seminars and/or direct students to the resources offered by the University of Minnesota and other organizations in these areas. Students with little professional experience could be encouraged to use offices like the Office for Special Learning Opportunities to set up internships and practicums in a work environment. Although advisers already do much of this kind or referral, a formal pre-enrollment program might provide students with further support and feelings of belonging during a possibly difficult time of transition.

The role and extent of institutional and situational barriers need to be explored with students. For example, how can work and home responsibilities be modified to allow for class and study time? How important to the student is the use of prior and experiential learning? Can the proposed area of concentration be better served elsewhere within the University of Minnesota or at another institution?

Although these questions are now raised by advisers when appropriate, these research results should make discussion with prospective students more systematic and focussed. Advisers can now tell students that certain characteristics, especially in combination with other factors, appear to put them at high risk for not completing the degree program. Again, advisers

might suggest some of the pre-enrollment options selected above, or refer students to other more appropriate programs. The reverse is also true; advisers can encourage students with the background and motivation that is predictive of success in PIL.

Another critical stage for intrusive academic advising is in the early stages of program implementation. It is at this point that many students withdraw or are dropped from PIL. Especially if a communication gap develops between the student and adviser, advisers should take a more proactive role than usual as the student moves from degree planning to program implementation. Phone calls to these students may be appropriate, or advisers could initiate a series of regular appointments with those students who appear to be at risk, to help them with problems faced at this stage. For students who are having difficulty structuring their time, advisers could encourage some formal coursework to help students into a study routine. For those students who need to build confidence, help in structuring a project based on prior learning would be appropriate.

Although these approaches are already used by advisers, these research results confirm the necessity for additional special advising services, especially during certain stages of students' programs. An increased awareness of these danger periods can enhance PIL's ability to respond to student needs, which could also contribute to decreased student attrition.

Implications for Program Development and Administration

PIL structures and policies need to be examined in light of these research results. The preliminary findings regarding retention rates of distant students have already contributed to a review by the PIL staff of services to students outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. This review has attempted to answer a variety of questions. Should PIL continue to serve distant students? If so, how can this service be improved so that students persist in greater numbers? Should distant students be required to have a specified amount of previous college credits, and/or a certain number of past years of related professional experience? Or should requirements for admission remain the same, but a warning be issued to those students at greatest risk?

PIL should do a pilot project with distant students to test admission requirements for this group. All students who cannot commute to the University on a regular (i.e., weekly) basis would be classified as distant learners. In order to be admitted to PIL they would need to meet the following criteria: a minimum of two years past college work, at least five years of professional experience in a field related to their area of concentration, access to a university or college library, and college-level writing skills. The attrition rate of students admitted under these criteria would need to be monitored on a quarterly and yearly basis to compare their retention and

completion rates with those of students admitted earlier without these criteria.

PIL might consider developing a Life Planning Seminar open to all PIL prospective students to help people examine their priorities and life circumstances before actually enrolling in a degree program.[1] This seminar could give people an opportunity to think about their values, their life priorities, and their personal characteristics. A tool such as R. J. Leider's "The Purpose Profile" could be used to explore the different purposes and priorities people have in life (see Appendix D). Time and stress management exercises could be offered. Adult career development issues, such as the dilemmas posed by combining work, family, and school, could be discussed. This kind of seminar would lead prospective students to more informed choices about whether to pursue higher education, and if so, in what type of program.

For those people who do choose to enroll in PIL, other special support systems should be available. Although most PIL students currently attend an on-campus degree planning seminar that provides orientation and peer group support during the first weeks of enrollment, additional strategies may be necessary for high risk students. Those people with less academic training may need skill development workshops or referrals to study skills counseling services. Those with

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[1]The idea, title, and content of this seminar draw heavily on Professor L. Sunny Hansen's course EPsy 5400 Counseling Skills for a New Age, University of Minnesota.

multiple roles and schedule pressures may benefit from a mentoring relationship with a PIL graduate who has successfully managed similar circumstances. Again, a program policy of intrusive advising that includes phone calling and regular individual appointments may be appropriate.

Finally, PIL may want to consider intervention mechanisms during the transition from degree planning to program implementation. A combination of special seminars or support groups, intrusive individual advising, and a network of potential mentors may be necessary for this stage, especially for populations with special risk factors.

Implications for Research

This research project revealed a number of areas for further investigation. Continuing information is needed on actual rates of retention for adult students. Because most students who are dropped or withdraw from PIL do so early in their degree studies, a retention rate of approximately 50 to 60 percent can be predicted for students admitted after 1984. PIL should consider doing quarterly or yearly calculations of retention to monitor any changes in this rate and to consider possible reasons for improvement or decline.

A comparison with overall University of Minnesota adult student retention rates would be useful for analyzing what works and what does not appear to work with this special population. More research needs to be done nationally on

attrition and retention of adult students in both traditional and nor-traditional degree programs. These results could lead to improved services to students and could help students make more informed choices about the programs most appropriate to their needs.

Further research needs to conducted on the effectiveness of intervention strategies with adult students. Is intrusive advising effective in retaining students? Do special seminars and support groups improve student retention? How effective are mentoring programs with adult students? Continued research on demographic factors such as age, gender, residence, and past education and experience will be necessary to identify any trends or changes in retention rates for adult degree-seeking students. Since distance from the program was associated negatively with retention in this sample, this phase of the study should be replicated. Further studies should examine what has and has not been effective with distant students.

Future research also should include tests for statistical significance. Results of the research can then be generalized to populations other than the sample studied, and the strength of the relationships between variables can be determined.

An additional area for further investigation is related to the tools used for research on adult students' reasons for pursuing higher education. Although Cyril Houle's learning orientations typology was useful for this PIL research, the categories could be further refined for use specifically with

that portion of the adult student population that is enrolled in degree programs. It is clear that this group was very goal oriented; this category might then be further subdivided into groupings such as credential-oriented, job-oriented, or oriented to social change and reform. Are these different goals associated with differences in student retention? Do different reasons for pursuing higher education dictate different types of program delivery and service? The numbers of degree seeking adults are increasing, and research tools specific to this population need further development.

Finally, a future study should focus specifically on the group of PIL students who were dropped or withdrew from the program. Does this group present any consistent demographic chracteristics? What factors influenced their decisions not to continue their studies? How might PIL have served them differently? A study of this nature might reveal aspects of the PIL structure and policies that need to be revised to better serve diverse student needs.

Student Profiles Revisited

How might the results of this research study have influenced the academic success of Faith, Bob, and Jane, whose experiences were described in Chapter One? How might services to them have been different? What different outcomes might have been possible?

Faith's reasons for pursuing higher education, which were centered around work and credentialing, might have been scrutinized more carefully in the pre-admissions advising stage. (Faith withdrew after two quarters in PIL, upon approval of her degree plan.) Perhaps when confronted with the fact that job skills alone could not be the focus of a liberal arts baccalaureate education, Faith would have selected a different method for achieving her objectives; while another method would not have guaranteed achievement of the degree, it might have been less frustrating for her.

For Bob, earlier graduation might have been accomplished with the help of academic support networks. During degree planning, for example, he might have found a workshop of the liberal arts helpful. As he approached his major project, a research and writing seminar would have been useful. Bob would have been a good candidate for a mentor relationship throughout his studies.

And for Jane, challenges and opportunities more suited to her unique talents might have been more consciously planned if she had been recognized as typical of the growing minority of PIL students who are young, very bright, and who can succeed in rigorous academic work. The strength of her past academic work would have made her a good candidate for an honors program. Her interests and abilities in social awareness and change could have been shaped into a project worthy of a program merit award or scholarship. She could have been approached to serve

as a peer mentor to other PIL students who were having more difficulty with academic work.

In all three of these cases, the PIL retention rate may have remained unchanged, but student satisfaction and student success would have improved. Or, perhaps Faith would not have been admitted but rather referred, so the persistence rate would have improved slightly. Academic success should be defined in terms of meeting students' needs, rather than solely in terms of student retention. Meeting students' needs, goals, and expectations is an essential feature of higher education, even if it means lower enrollment and retention figures. In Faith's case, for example, being successful may have involved withdrawing from PIL and enrolling in another educational program, or taking advantage of professional opportunities appropriate to her needs and goals.

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APPENDIX A

Program Description

THE PROGRAM FOR INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING

The Program for Individualized Learning began in 1971 as one of the nation's first University Without Walls programs. It grew from two fundamental convictions: that quality learning can take place in many different environments and that students should be actively involved in charting their own education.

The Program offers educationally mature students the opportunity to create their own individualized B.A. or B.S. degrees building on the special strengths and resources of the University of Minnesota. The program serves students:

- o who want significant responsibility for the design and implementation of their degree programs;
- o who have knowledge, gained from experience, that they want assessed;
- o who have educational needs that cannot be met through other programs; or
- o who seek to use a variety of educational resources and learning strategies.

In considering this educational option, students must think about learning in some new ways. Since there are no predesigned majors or prescribed curricula, each student develops an individualized degree plan to meet specific educational goals. A set of standards, called graduation criteria, provides a framework for structuring degree programs and serves as a measure for assessing completion of degree requirements.

GRADUATION CRITERIA FOR THE B.A. AND B.S. DEGREES

The Program demands levels of achievement and quality equal to those of other baccalaureate programs at the University of Minnesota. The graduation criteria include:

Depth criteria: in-depth knowledge in an area of concentration
Breadth criteria: broad learning in the liberal arts
Writing criterion: a command of written English

The area of concentration (major) should reflect balance, depth, and quality in a field of study, which may be interdisciplinary or specialized in focus. Students pursue programs in a wide variety of fields, and our ability to serve them is dependent upon the availability of faculty at the University who have the time, interest, and expertise needed to work with them.

The areas of concentration of some recent graduates include: urban development administration, performing arts, English literature with emphasis on the novel, cardiac pathology, organizational training and development, zoology with emphasis on ornithology, nature conservation, and experiential education.

THE FOUR STAGES OF THE DEGREE PROGRAM

Admissions Stage: The program is selective and academic advisers work extensively with prospective students to help them determine if the program is appropriate for them. Students who find their goals and learning style complemented by the Program prepare an application to demonstrate they have the abilities needed for individualized study. They must demonstrate: reasons for selecting the program, the ability to design a field of study, a basic understanding of the liberal arts, the skill to develop an independent learning project, and a college-level command of written English.

Degree Planning Stage: After admission, students develop a degree plan that details all of the completed and future courses or independent projects they intend to use in fulfilling the graduation criteria. The degree plan evolves through close interaction among the student, the faculty adviser, and Individualized Learning academic adviser.

Program Implementation Stage: After the degree plan is approved, students complete all of the learning activities described in the plan. Activities will often include college classes, correspondence courses, and independent learning projects, and assessment of knowledge acquired in the past.

Graduation Stage: At the end of the program, students compile a graduation dossier and prepare an essay to demonstrate successful completion of the degree. This stage culminates when the final graduation review committee, composed of faculty, academic professionals, and students, review the student's program and recommend awarding the degree.

THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY

The program strives to maintain an atmosphere of support, cooperation, and challenge for its students. Students work closely with faculty and academic advisers to design and complete their degree programs. They will:

- work closely with a University of Minnesota faculty member who has expertise in their area of concentration;
- be guided in their degree program by an academic adviser who specializes in individualized education;
- learn to use educators from the entire University as teachers, evaluators, researhers, and project advisers; and
- receive direction and assistance in coping with the complex resources and systems of the University.

While collaboration, cooperation, and support are integral to the program, independence and self-motivation are also critical to students' success. Students have a major role in the creation and implementation of their B.A. or B.S. degree programs and these characteristics are vital to personal and academic achievement.

APPENDIX B

Data Forms

DATA FORM

Applicant's Name: Quarter/Year of Application:

Admitted: Yes ☐ No ☐ Date_____

Enrolled: Yes ☐ No ☐ Date_____

Drop/Withdraw: Yes ☐ Date_____

Graduated: Yes ☐ Date_____

☐ Currently enrolled and active.

Age (At Date of Application)_____Sex_____

Residence: (Check One)

_____ Twin Cities Metro Area _____ Greater Minnesota

_____ USA _____ International

Past Post-Secondary Education (At Date of Application):

Completed College Credits = _____
(Quarter or Semester)

Other Post-Secondary Training = _____
(TVI, RN, etc.)

Previous degrees granted = _____

Past experience related to the applicant's proposed area of concentration (number of years):

Professional experience = _____

Volunteer experience = _____

Other (hobby, avocation) = _____

What are the applicant's reasons for seeking further education? (Check all that apply.) If it is possible to identify the single most important factor, circle it.

_____ Love of reading/learning (LLS)

_____ Personal curiosity/urge to discover (LLS)

_____ Desire for knowledge (an inquiring mind) (LLS)

_____ Social outlet, meet new people (AO)

_____ Seek comfortable, stimulating situation (AO)

_____ Solve individual problem(s) (GO)

_____ Promotion (GO)

_____ Credential/licensure (GO)

_____ Secure a job or improve job skills (GO)

_____ Social reform (GO)

Reasons for Applying to University Without Walls:
(Check all mentioned)

_____ Area of concentration not available elsewhere in the institution (I)

_____ Use prior knowledge in degree program (I)

_____ Desire to use independent study methods (I)

_____ Conflicts with work, home, and community obligations (S)

_____ Physical handicap (S)

_____ Physical distance from campus (S)

_____ Need for individualized attention (PS)

_____ Dislike structured learning environment (PS)

_____ Other

How much time has been spent in each of the program stages? (Since date of enrollment.)

	Number of Quarters	Date Completed
Degree Planning(DP)		
Program Implementation(PI)		
Major Project(MP)		
Graduation Dossier Preparation(GDP)		
Graduation Review(GR)		

If the student has dropped or withdrawn from the program, at what stage in the program was he or she at that point?

_____ DP _____ PI _____ MP _____GDP _____ GR

If the student was in the program implementation stage at the point of drop/withdrawal, approximately what percent of work had been completed? (Check one)

_____ 25% _____ 50% _____75% _____100% _____Not in PI Stage

Adviser originally assigned_____

Current or last adviser_____

ADVISER INTERVIEW FORM

Student's Name_____

Adviser's Name_____

Area Specialist's Name_____

1. Which of the following forms of communication have you used with this student? In what approximate percentages (to equal 100%)?

In-person meetings _____

Phone consultations_____

Correspondence _____

2. Approximately how frequently do you communicate with this student (Check one)?

_____ Weekly

_____ Monthly

_____ Quarterly

_____ Twice to three times a year

Other (Describe)_____

3. Is the pattern of communication with the student regular or irregular? Please describe.

4. Approximately what percentage of the courses and projects proposed in the program implementation stage have been completed?

Projects:_____0 _____ 25% _____ 50% _____ 75% _____ 100%

Courses: _____0 _____ 25% _____ 50% _____ 75% _____ 100%

5. What aspects of the graduation process has the student completed (check all completed tasks):

_____ None

_____ Drafted the statement of readiness

_____ Compiled the dossier

_____ Completed preliminary review

_____ Met with the graduation committee

6. Has the student attended any of the seminars offered by UWW/PIL? (Check the ones attended and provide the quarter and year)

_____ Degree Planning _____ qtr/yr

_____ Research and Writing _____ qtr/yr

_____ Project Development _____ qtr/yr

_____ Dossier Preparation _____ qtr/yr

7. Rate the attention given to the following topics in advising sessions:

	Extensive	Moderate	Little	None
	4	3	2	1
Goal setting	4	3	2	1
Prior learning	4	3	2	1
Project selection	4	3	2	1
Personal problems	4	3	2	1
Registration	4	3	2	1
Time management	4	3	2	1
Financial aid	4	3	2	1
Assuming responsibility for own education	4	3	2	1
Other _____	4	3	2	1

8. If the student dropped or withdrew from the program, what are your perceptions of the reasons for this action? (Check all that apply)

_____ Financial constraints

_____ Too great a time commitment

_____ Student lacked ability to do program

_____ Personal reasons (health, job change, etc.)

_____ Goals changed

_____ Other

APPENDIX C

Approval from Committee on Use of Human Subjects

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
TWIN CITIES

Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research
1919 University Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104
(612) 624-9829

November 24, 1987

Shirley Holm
Program for Individualized Learning
201 Wesbrook Hall
Minneapolis Campus

RE: "Academic Advising and Retention of Adult Learners in an Individualized Degree Program"

Dear Ms. Holm:

The Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research has received your response to its letter of November 11, 1987 . Since this information satisfies the stipulations indicated by the Committee, final approval for the project is noted in our files.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to bring to the attention of the Committee any proposed changes in the research project that will affect human subjects. If you have any questions, please call me at 624-9829.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you success with the proposed research.

Sincerely,

Moira Keane

Moira Keane
Administrative Assistant

MK/tls

APPENDIX D

The Purpose Profile

THE PURPOSE PROFILE

Too often life just happens. Life evolves without a great deal of thought being directed toward the quality of its days, months, and years.

To be sure, each day each of us has a myriad of feelings racing through our mind and body: joy; frustration; fear; sadness; eager anticipation and on and on. So perhaps it's time to recognize a fact. LIFE IS NOT A DRESS REHEARSAL.

A provocative method of assessing what is going on in your life is to spend some time with The Purpose Profile. Exciting things often happen after a "life exam."

Just as it makes sense to periodically review your financial and physical health, it is important to regularly assess your personal well-being. After completing this Profile, try letting your spouse or a significant person in your life answer the same questions about you. Be sure though, that both of you approach the questions thoughtfully and with complete honesty.

There are no wrong answers. Take enough time thinking about the questions to really get to the truth about you.

"This is the true joy in life—the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being the force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole commmunity and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die—for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I've got a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

—George Bernard Shaw

THE PURPOSE PROFILE

1. Do I recognize what I'm good at... my most enjoyed skills? 1. _____
2. Do I fully utilize my most enjoyed skills in my work? 2. _____
3. Does my work further some interest or issue that I care deeply about? 3. _____
4. Do I see myself, through my work, as making a difference in the world? 4. _____
5. Do I view most work days with a sense of enthusiasm (vs. an economic chore)? 5. _____
6. Have I developed my own philosophy of life and success? 6. _____
7. Am I taking the necessary risks to live my philosophy? 7. _____
8. Do I feel a sense of meaning and purpose for my life? 8. _____
9. Do I have written goals this year relating to my purpose? 9. _____
10. Am I living my life now (vs. hoping that life will work out some day)? 10. _____

TOTAL_____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE